ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY CHANGE: INTERPRETING CHANGE IN PRIVATE LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGES

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This study aimed at filling in the gap in the literature by examining the organizational identity (OI) of a group of private not-for-profit liberal arts colleges (LACs) and their change and/or stability over time. The OIs were investigated by employing a qualitative content analysis for the strategic plans of eleven LACs over time. The selected colleges represented the distinctive characteristics of a LAC though they have made a critical organizational change by adding vocational programs to their curriculum. Findings indicated that the colleges have developed more complex dynamic OIs over time where both change and stability were interacting. Internal and external pressures shaped the organizational identities of the colleges. The colleges could remain some of their distinctive features while other markers of distinctiveness were less pronounced. OI, as a means to combine insights from the classic and new versions of institutional theory, could offer a fruitful link between the normative and the intraorganizational elements of this theory.

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Say, "Indeed, my prayer, my rites of sacrifice, my living and my dying are for Allah, Lord of the worlds."

The Quran, 6, 162

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background, Theory and Problem Statement

American higher education has been experiencing tremendous transformational forces in the last few decades (Gumport, 2000; Kezar, 2014; Loomis & Rodriguez, 2009; Morphew, 2009). Cost constraints, accountability, technology, globalization, changing demographics and new teaching and learning techniques are examples of these forces (Kezar, 2001). Although these challenges are affecting the higher education landscape, they are especially acute for private liberal arts colleges (LACs) (Baker, Baldwin, & Makker, 2012; Tarrant, Bray, & Katsinas, 2018). In response to those challenges, organizational change has become a necessity and a constant need in higher education in general (Gumport, 2000; Kezar, 2001; Loomis & Rodriguez, 2009) and in private LACs in particular (Baker & Baldwin, 2015). This change includes changes in structures, practices, and/or symbols of higher education organizations (HEOs) (Brint, Riddle, Turk-Bicakci, & Levy 2005; Gumport, 2000; Hartley, 2003; Hartley & Schall, 2005, Morphew, 2002; Tarrant et al., 2018; Taylor & Weerts, 2017).

The occurrence of those changes has held the attentions of researchers; several studies have been conducted in trying to describe and interpret the nature, direction and consequences of those transformations. Various explanations have resulted from those studies (Brint et al., 2005; Gumport, 2000; Loomis & Rodriguez, 2009; Morphew, 2002, 2009). Among those explanations, two contradictory views can be highlighted in the literature. One confirms the perspective of the new institutional theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). According to the new institutional theory, changes in structures, practices, or symbols of HEOs are normative in nature. They are described as conversions to the prevailing norms and standards which are considered as the appropriate,

proper and right ways of doing things in the field of higher education (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). Attaining greater legitimacy and improving the external image of the institution are considered as the main motives behind the adoption of these changes (Morphew, 2002). As different HEOs are converging and moving toward the adoption of the same forms and practices, the homogeneity (isomorphism) among these organizations is increasing (Delucchi, 1997; Morphew, 2009).

In contrast to this view, other studies of change in higher education provide support to the classic version of institutional theory, which views change as intraorganizational in nature. According to this view, changes are described as one of the internal dynamics emerge in institutions from patterns of organizational interaction and adaptations (Selznick, 1957). They are natural developments colleges and universities make in response to various internal and external demands (Selznick, 1996). The distinctive cultural life of the individual college or university is emphasized as playing a crucial role in change decision-making and in directing the change process (Baker & Baldwin, 2015; Clark, 1972; Freeland, 2009; Kraatz & Zajac, 1996). Thus, differences, not similarity, between HEOs in responses to external pressures are emphasized according to this view.

Based on institutional theory, studies of higher education organizations have revealed contradictory descriptions and explanations of why organizational change occurs and its impact on colleges and universities. While the neo-institutional view gives more attention to contextual forces, the other traditional version emphasizes the intraorganizational dynamics of the institutions. The new institutionalism is primarily concerned with colleges and universities as organizations in the field of higher education whereas the classic institutional theory focuses on individual colleges or universities (Greenwoods & Hinnings, 1996). Neither version of

institutional theory could provide a convincing interpretation and conceptualization of change in this sector (Stensaker, 2004). Thus, scholars have proposed reconciliation between the two versions as a more plausible way for understanding organizational change (Abrutyn &Turner, 2011; Greenwoods & Hinnings, 1996; Selznick, 1996; Stensaker, 2004; Stensaker et al., 2019). Some even argue that change cannot be understood without combining the two theories (Greenwoods & Hinnings, 1996).

One suggestion for combining the two views of the theory is through the use of organizational identity (OI) as a lens to describe and interpret change in HEOs (Stensaker, 2004, 2015; Weerts, Freed, & Morphew, 2014). This concept is being seen a promising development that can build a bridge between the influence of both internal and external factors and therefore between the distinctiveness and similarity of organizations in relation to other organizations (Hatch & Schultz, 2002; Gioia, Patvardhan, Hamelton, & Corley, 2013). Some scholars argue that this concept may lead to a better, deeper, and more comprehensive interpretation of organizational change in the higher education sector (Gioia et al., 2013; Hatch & Schultz, 2002; Morphew, Fumasoli, & Stensaker, 2018; Stensaker, 2015). However, there is still a clear lack of empirical research to assess and refine this claim (Stensaker, 2015; Weerts et al, 2014).

This study attempts to fill in this gap in the literature by examining the OIs of a group of private not-for-profit LACs and their change and/or stability over time. The OIs are investigated by analyzing the strategic plans of these colleges over time. The aim is to investigate whether the use of OI as a concept can reconcile the old with the new institutionalism interpretation of change in this type of HEOs. More specifically, the focus is on studying whether the analysis of the OIs of private LACs can provide a better interpretation of the changes occurring in this segment of higher education.

Four characteristics of LACs make this type of HEOs an interesting case for this research. First, private LACs have been implementing several changes in structures, practices and/or symbols in the last few decades in response to great environmental challenges (Baker et al., 2012; Tarrant et al., 2018). Although these changes are occurring in other higher education institutions, they are particularly apparent in the distinctive American LACs (Baker & Baldwin, 2015). This has raised a question of whether these colleges are disappearing or they are just evolving and made a need for an exploration and understanding of the change occurring in them (Baker & Baldwin, 2015; Morphew, 2002). Second, the contradictory explanations of change are more reflected in the literature of this segment (Hartley & Schall, 2005; Morphew, 2002, 2009) revealing a clear debate about this change and its impacts on the identification of these institutions (Breneman, 1990; Baker et al., 2012). Third, private LACs are similar in the broad features of their OI; for example, they are all identified as being small, emphasizing liberal arts education and focusing on undergraduate programs (Breneman, 1990). However, they also exhibit distinctiveness in some ways; for example, some of them target specific student population (women colleges), some of them are highly selective while others are more inclusive, and some of them are religious while others are secular (Taylor & Morphew, 2010). This makes them a good topic for adjudicating the dispute of OI similarity and distinctiveness resulted from organizational change. Also, the conflict between sticking to their traditional cultural identity and morphing into a new one is more obvious in the literature of this type of HEOs (Hartley, 2003).

Although private LACs have witnessed various changes, this study focuses on adding professional programs to their curriculum as one of the most critical and controversial change in these institutions (Baker & Baldwin, 2015). This is because it is a change in the curricula of a group of colleges defined by their curricula. This change has impacted this segment to different

degrees. Some colleges which used to be known as LACs could not sustain the characteristics of this identity; they now belong to another category (Morphew, 2009). However, others could still be identified as LACs, based on the criteria of Breneman (1990) of what a LAC is. This study focuses on analyzing the OIs of a sample from this group, which still represent the distinctive characteristics of a LAC though they have made a critical organizational change by adding vocational programs to their curriculum.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to understand change in private not-for-profit LACs by analyzing their OIs as communicated in their strategic plans. These colleges have added professional degrees to their curriculum, yet they still remain focused on the liberal arts, as determined by the Carnegie Classification. By analyzing the strategic plans of this group of LACs over time, change and stability of their OIs can be described. Also, by exploring the OIs of this group of private LACs, I am able to examine how internal and external interests, and distinctiveness and similarity are reflected in these identities. The goal is to see whether the use of the concept of OI as a lens to understand change can reconcile the contradictory views of explaining a critical change occurring in this segment of HEOs. The findings of this study may lead to a better and more comprehensive understanding of change in LACs. This research is guided by the following questions:

1. How have the organizational identities (OIs) that private not-for-profit liberal arts colleges (LACs) presented in their strategic plans changed or remained stable over time?
2. How are the internal and external interests of those colleges reflected in their OIs?
3. What are the distinctive features in the OIs of those colleges?

Significance of the Study

American higher education is currently in an era of accelerated challenges and pressures. Confronting those challenges has made colleges and universities acquire new practices and structures through time (Weerts et al., 2014). Such challenges have made organizational change a central research issue, raising the critical questions that are related to the change and stability of the main values and purposes of higher education and the conflicts between the internal and external needs and expectations. Contradictory views and explanations of the meanings of those changes and their outcomes have resulted, particularly reflected in institutional theory. Current literature demonstrates the need for examining the OI of HEOs in order to reach a better understanding of change in these institutions (Stensaker, 2015). However, the lack of empirical studies using this lens to explore change demonstrates a clear need for further research. My attempt is to fill in this gap in the literature. This study uses this concept to add to the knowledge of change in higher education by trying to understand it from this new perspective. By using this concept, I seek to provide a more complete account for understanding organizational interpretations of, and responses to, environmental pressures, by considering both the intraorganizational behavior and the normative embeddedness of private LACs within their field. This study contributes to the existing literature of change in higher education by elucidating the nature of change occurring in the identity of this segment of higher education. This study may also help in building a conceptual framework for OI change in higher education. This framework can present a bridge between the contradictory views of the old and new institutionalism of change in tertiary education. Developing this contribution to institutional theory may enhance the interpretation of change in different HEOs.

Moreover, this study is an attempt to provide a clarification and explanation of how the

changing environment in the sector is impacting LACs. This description may contribute to solving the conflicts these institutions and their leaders are currently facing. It is intended to help LACs' leaders to understand the nuances of a LAC identity. It also contributes to the efforts of providing guidance to leaders of these colleges in what changes they need to implement and how to maintain balance between different conflicting constituents and needs. This understanding will help them in approaching change in this identity, addressing the roles of internal and external needs and expectations, and making decisions to balance them. It also sheds light on how to address the common goals shared by other colleges and remain the distinctive values of the individual college.

Definitions of Key Terms

In this study, organizational identity (OI), organizational change, and liberal arts colleges (LACs), higher education field and higher education organizations (HEOs) are fundamental terms that need to be defined and understood throughout the research. These terms are defined as follows:

- *Higher education field:* an organizational field which constitutes a recognized area of institutionalized environment with rationalized norms and rules, key suppliers, regulatory agencies, and resource and product consumers (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).
- *Higher education organizations (HEOs):* any post-secondary organization that belongs to the higher education field, whether it is a college, university or professional school, and reflect its patterns and norms.
- *Liberal arts colleges*: higher education institutions that are primarily undergraduate colleges with primary emphasis on baccalaureate programs; at least half of their baccalaureate degrees in liberal arts fields" (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2018).

Moreover, residential life, small size (not more than 2500), and the focus on undergraduate student population are considered other main characteristics of these colleges (Breneman, 1990).

- *Organizational change:* "those intentional acts where a particular leader drives or implements a new direction" (Kezar, 2014, p. xii).
- *Organizational identity*: the answer to the existential question of "who is the organization?" This answer is formed, maintained and changed through a dynamic set of processes in which the internal and external selves of the organization are continuously interacting. The result of this interaction is explicit statements capturing the collective meanings of the organization, which reflect both its similarity to and its distinctiveness from other organizations in its field (Gioia et al., 2013; Hatch & Schultz, 2002; Stensaker, 2015).

Organization of the Study

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. In chapter 1, the statement of the problem, purpose of the study, theoretical framework, research questions, and definitions of key terms are introduced. The relevant literature review is presented in chapter 2. This review starts by discussing the contradictory views of change in higher education based on the two versions of institutional theory, the new and old one, and why the focus is on this theory. Then, I introduce the concept of OI by defining it and highlighting its relevance to the study of organizational change in higher education. After that, an overview of private LACs is presented, including their characteristics, their challenges, and some of the changes they have implemented. This is followed by a discussion of the contradictory views of interpreting the change in the curriculum of these institutions, based on the theoretical perspectives of the classic and the new institutional theory. The available research demonstrates that applying the two versions of the theory to explain curriculum change in LACs reveals that each one has specific strengths and weaknesses.

It also suggests that OI can be a more promising way to think about the theories' percepts and how they apply to LACs. However, it provides a limited understanding of how the use of this concept can provide a better understanding of change in private LACs; a gap that will be filled by this research.

Chapter 3 describes the method of the research and the procedures that were followed for collecting and analyzing the data. This includes a description of qualitative content analysis as a method for the study and the rationale behind choosing it. The chapter also describes the sampling procedure, the data collection sources, the data analysis process, and limitations of the study.

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study. These findings resulted from merging the themes derived from each individual college into a set of themes appropriate to each of the research questions. Finally, in chapter 5, I discuss these findings, relate them to the extant literature and draw conclusions. The practical implications of these findings and recommendations for future research are also presented in this chapter.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVEIW

In this chapter, a brief discussion of the institutional theory views of change, the new and old one, are presented. Then, I introduce the concept of OI by defining it and highlighting its relevance to the study of change in higher education. After that, an overview of private LACs is presented, including their characteristics, their challenges, and some of the changes they have implemented. This is followed by a discussion of the contradictory views of interpreting the change in the curriculum of these colleges, based on the theoretical perspectives of the classis and the new institutional theory. This discussion leads to the OI dynamic model (Hatch & Schultz, 2002) as a theoretical framework for this study.

Interpreting Change in Institutional Theory

In this section, I introduce the propositions of the two versions of institutional theory in regard to change in higher education and their contradictory views of explaining this change. More detailed argument of the conflict between the two institutional perspectives is presented when discussing curriculum change in private LACs as a case for this study. Different disciplines, including economics, politics, and sociology, have contributed to the building of the multiple versions of institutional theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). The following discussion is based on the argument and conflict within the sociological version of this theory regarding change in HEOs.

According to the sociological version of the old institutionalism, change in structures, practices or symbols is viewed as an intraorganizational dynamics; a natural development the college or university goes through over time (Clark, 1970; Selznick, 1957). The internal technical environment of the organization plays a crucial role in directing this change and its

process (Selznick, 1957). Moreover, the distinctive character of the academic institution is emphasized in this perspective (Clark, 1970, 1972). This view is based on the proposition that institutions, like colleges and universities, are established by setting explicit rules and formal structure, which are believed to be effective for achieving the defined goals of these institutions (Leslie, Slaughter, Taylor, & Zhang, 2012). Organizational members are expected to be socialized through these rules and values (Leslie et al., 2012). This socialization results in the establishment of unique myths and tradition for the college or university, which are believed to continue over time (Clark, 1972). Moreover, colleges and universities are expected to behave in a manner consistent with their unique cultural values and beliefs, and change should proceed according that culture (Leslie et al., 2012; Stensaker, 2004). Thus, the stability of organizations over time is emphasized in this theory and change is seen as a step-wise natural evolution this organization goes through (Stensaker, 2004).

Later, a new theoretical trend appeared to contradict this traditional view of institutional theory; this trend has become known as the new institutional theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). It is called "new" because its propositions came with a new sociological view of institutions and a rejection of the traditional or "old" view of institutional theory (Kraatz & Zajac, 1996). The main contribution of this theory is on drawing the attention of scholars to the existence and importance of the norms and rules that are not inside the organization, but are outside the organization (Stensaker, 2004). These norms and standards have been described in the literature as the "iron cage" in which these institutions exist (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). According to this theory, the pressures to work under normative rules and regulations, which can come from state, professions, or organizations; lead organizations to form a distinguished area of institutional life (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). When a group of organizations constitute a

recognized institutional life, which means they have their key suppliers, resources, customers and other organizations that provide similar services, this constitutes what is called an organizational field (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). Each organizational field has its own unique norms, characteristics, and standards to which its organizations should submit to. Thus, according to this view, changes in forms, practices or symbols of HEOs are described as adoptions of the external organizational norms and standards of the organizational field (Tolbert & Zucker, 1983). As what is considered normative and appropriate changes in the field, organizations are expected to adapt to this new standard or practice (Stensaker, 2004). Thus, the stability of the unique organizational values and rules of the individual institution is deemphasized in this theory. Seeking legitimacy and survival, not enhancing effectiveness or efficiency, are the main motives behind acquiring these rationalized norms and practices by the organizations (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). Legitimate change is the one that aims at converging to the accepted behaviors and rules generalized in the organizational field of the organizations (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). Organizations are expected to fail if they do not conform to the dominant institutionalized behaviors in their filed; their success and survival depend on this conformity to the dominant perceptions of appropriateness and legitimacy (Selznick, 1996). Since change is seen as adopting the same practices and norms of the organizational field, this converging change will result in increasing the homogeneity or isomorphism of organizations in the same field (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991).

Although change in higher education has been described through other theoretical foundations, like resource dependence theory (Morphew, 2002) and population ecology theory (Birnbaum, 1983), I have chosen to focus on institutional theory perspectives of change for a number of reasons. First, this theory deals specifically with the relationship between

organizations and their external environment, which is the focus of this research. It is considered as a dominant theory for studying this relationship (Kraatz & Zajac, 1996; DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Stensaker, 2004). Moreover, the theory explains how organizations, like HEOs, deal with situations characterized by challenges, pressures and uncertainty (Morphew, 2009; Stensaker, 2004), which is the current characteristic of the higher education environment (Kezar, 2014; Loomis & Rodriguez, 2009). In regard to change as a response to this challenging environment, this theory is described as a more natural fit for the higher education change arena (Weerts et al., 2014). It has been found to be very useful for understanding how highly institutionalized organizations like HEOs view and respond to change (Morphew, 2009). The two versions of the theory represent the conflict of describing change in higher education as revealed in the extant literature. They represent both the rationality of change as being consistent with the organization's internal values and rules and its irrationality as being imitating external normative standards in the field (Leslie et al., 2012). The two forms of the theory also reflect the contradiction of describing this change as convergence leading to more homogeneity among HEOs or as a divergent change reflecting their distinctive characters (Stensaker, 2004). In other words, the theory reflects the multiple and complementary roles and influences of various contradictory forces in the change process that represent the current situation of HEOs (Weerts et al., 2014). These characteristics of this theory helps me in describing and understanding change in LACs, which may also shed light on change in HEOs in general.

The premises of institutional theory have been discussed conceptually and examined empirically in the literature of higher education. Since the neo-institutionalism is considered the new version, most of the studies focused on testing its propositions. Findings of some of those studies showed some partial support for the predictions of this theory, especially in regard to

legitimacy and isomorphism (Harris, 2013; Morphew, 1996; Morphew, 2009; Morphew & Jenniskens, 1999; Saichaie & Morphew, 2014). However, the new institutionalism has also shown some theoretical shortcomings and has raised some questions about its logic and rationality in explaining change, especially in the higher education sector (Stensaker, 2004). The results demonstrated the weakness of this theory in considering the role of the internal dynamics of organizational change (Greenwoods & Hinnings, 1996). There was a lack of explanation of why some organizations implement radical changes while others do not although these organizations are undergoing the same institutional pressures (Greenwoods & Hinnings, 1996; Stensaker, 2004). DiMaggio and Powell (1991) state that there are some challenging issues that the advocates of the new institutional theory need to tackle. Some of these concerns are the concepts of change, efficiency, and power in the organizational life of the institution (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). Interestingly, these aspects have been the focus of the old version of this theory (Stensaker, 2004). Empirical evidence in the literature has supported some of the principles of this version of the theory, especially the role of internal factors and the distinctive culture of the institution in the change process (Brint & Karabel, 1991; Burnett & Huisman, 2010; Kraatz & Zajac, 1996; Morphew & Huisman, 1999; Stensaker et al., 2019). Thus, in an attempt to provide a clearer and more viable interpretation of the changes occurring in the landscape of higher education, some scholars have proposed reconciliation between the two versions as a more plausible way for understanding organizational change (Abrutyn &Turner, 2011; Greenwoods & Hinnings, 1996; Selznick, 1996; Stensaker, 2004; Stensaker et al., 2019). They claim that the divide between the two versions in understanding change is not necessary (Selznick, 1996). They argue that what is needed is a multiple-perspective lens, which can combine both versions of the theory to understand change in a more comprehensive way (Greenwoods & Hinnings, 1996;

Stensaker, 2004). The concept of OI has been suggested to be this new lens because it connects the external environment of the organization with its intraorganizational dynamics, it reflects both the similarity of the organization to other organizations and its distinctiveness, and it includes both change and stability as its main characteristics. This makes OI a promising concept for combining insights from both theories of institutionalism and for yielding to better interpretation of change in HEOs (Gioia et al., 2013; Stensaker, 2004; Stensaker, 2015). However, more empirical research is still needed in this area. This study is an attempt to contribute to filling in this gap in the literature. It aims at examining the potential promise of OI in explaining organizational change in private LACs. In the following section, the definition of this concept is introduced and its relevance to the study of change in higher education is discussed.

Organizational Identity

OI can be defined simply as the answer to the existential question of "who is the organization?" This answer is formed, maintained and changed through a dynamic set of processes in which the internal and external selves of the organization are continuously interacting. The result of this interaction is explicit statements capturing the collective meanings of the organization, which reflect both its similarity to and its distinctiveness from other organizations in its fields. This definition is based on synthesizing the theoretical developments of conceptualizing OI in both organizational studies (Corley, Harquail, Pratt, Glynn, Fiol, & Hatch, 2006; Gioia et al., 2013; Hatch & Schultz, 2002) and in higher education (Macdonald, 2013; Stensaker, 2015; Weerts et al., 2014).

Traditionally, the concept has long been defined as those features of an organization that are central, continuing, and distinctive. This view has resulted from the study of Albert and

Whetten (1985), in which they could develop a conceptualization of what an OI is. Their study can be considered as the starting point of research interest in this notion. When studying the context of their own university as it was facing a budget cut, they concluded their study by defining OI as an answer to the question of "Who are we as an organization?" They state that this answer includes the following three components:

> The answer points to features that are somehow seen as the essence of the organization: the criterion of claimed central character. The answer points to features that distinguish the organization from others with which it may be compared: the criterion of claimed distinctiveness. The answer points to features that exhibit some degree of sameness or continuity over time: the criterion of claimed temporal continuity. (Albert & Whetten, 1985, p. 265)

These three components of OI, centrality, distinctiveness, and sameness, have been known as the three pillars of OI. The work of Albert and Whetten (1985) opened a door for more research in this field, which has led to more theoretical development in identifying this concept. The comprehensive review of the theoretical development of the idea of OI in the last three decades done by Gioia and his colleagues (2013) reveals that the concept has moved through stages since it started to appear in the literature. It moved from its "infancy" stage in 1980s, to the "developmental" stage in the mid- to late-1990s, to the "aged adolescence" stage in 2000s, and now it is moving to a mature stage as a core area in organization study (Gioia et al., & 2013). In higher education, research focusing on OI is considered a relatively new research area though the concept has appeared in studies of organizational culture and of marketing (Clark, 1970, 1972; Hartley & Morphew, 2008; Stensaker, 2007).

Throughout this development, the view of OI introduced by Albert and Whetten has received some criticisms and certain modifications have been made to the conceptualization of OI based on research findings. The concerns were mostly around the second and the third pillars of OI; findings of research raised questions about change of OI and its similarity to others'

(Gioia et al., 2013) The traditional view of OI as features intrinsically linked to the internal life of the organization and remain stable over time has been opposed by research findings demonstrating change in OI and the influence of external ideas on this identity (Stensaker, 2015). A substantial body of research could confirm the change of OI over relatively short periods of time (Gioia et al., 2013). The change was attributed to the fact that organizations, including HEOs, exist in an ever changing and dynamic world that require them to be more disintegrated and flexible than what is being suggested in the formulation of Albert and Whetten (Fumasoli, Pinheiro & Stensaker, 2015; Gioia et al., 2013). Thus, both change and continuity have been found to be characteristics of OI (Gioia et al., 2013; Stensaker, 2015). Some argue that the internal culture of the organization seems to be infusing the continuity aspect of OI while the external ideas are the ones that trigger change in this identity (Hatch & Schultz, 2002). Others claim that the labels used to describe identity of the organization are stable while the meanings given to those labels change and are reinterpreted (Gioia et al., 2013).

Another important element in defining OI is the fact that this concept has been found to be both highly contextualized (i.e., distinctive) and also comparative (Corley et al., 2006). Besides being viewed as features that distinguish the organization from others (Albert & Whetten, 1985), identity has become typically conceptualized in terms of the position of the organization within an established set of categories that define an organizational field (Corley et al., 2006; Gioia et al., 2013). This is due to the fact that OI places the organization in a social space by highlighting it as being like some other organizations and unlike others (Corley et al., 2006). Moreover, organizations are also found to benchmarking the features and institutional best practices of their field, which result in some similarity among these institutions (Gioia et al., 2013; Stensaker, 2004). In other words, distinctiveness and similarity are both found to be

essential elements in establishing OI. Thus, in order for a college or university to locate itself, it needs to evaluate its similarity to and difference from other organizations within its sphere of activities (Corley et al., 2006).

The previous description of OI indicates that using this concept may contribute to a better understanding of change occurring in HEOs in general, and in private LACs in particular. Change as a concept and process is found to be a complex and multidimensional one (Gumport, 2000; Kezar, 2001, 2014). Moreover, because of the complexity of HEOs themselves, organizational changes sometimes cannot be understood, the purpose of the change can be missed, and its direction may not be clear (Stensaker, 2004). This has been manifested in the contradictory views of change based on institutional theory. When examining how and why HEOs change in response to current shifting environment, conflicts occur in viewing this change as merely normative, inspired by external ideas that may increase the legitimacy of the institution or an intraorganizational change, where the internal organizational life of the institution stimulates and directs this change. (Stensaker, 2015). OI is a concept represents considerable promise in this situation, due to its seamless way of connecting between internal development and external dynamics of the organization as revealed in the previous discussion (Hatch & Schultz, 2002; Stensaker, 2015). This research is an attempt to examine empirically the potential contribution of this concept to understanding the interaction between the internal and external organizational factors.

Moreover, some argue that this concept can have another significance to another central debate about change in higher education. This debate is over the impact of the changes on the distinctiveness/similarity of HEOs. Whether this change reflects a tendency toward more convergence in the sector or the uniqueness of an individual HEO still remains a controversial

topic (Brint & Karabel 1991; Morphew & Hartley, 2006). The definition of OI indicates that both distinctiveness and similarity are two sides of this concept. Thus, through the focus on OI, it is possible to examine if both the unified structural dimensions of organizations and the distinctive cultural character of the college can coexist (Fumasoli et al., 2015). In other words, the concept of OI can add to our knowledge of whether as a result of the changes occur in HEOs, these institutions are becoming more similar or their distinctiveness can still be recognized (Stensaker, 2015). This research aims at contributing to the development of this knowledge.

Finally, OI is relevant to the study of change in higher education because it can build a bridge between change and stability. Though HEOs are described in the literature as continuously changing, they are also found to be highly institutionalized and resistant to change. Some argue that change and continuity are two phenomena that simultaneously occur at these institutions (Stensaker, 2015). OI is found to be a source of both stability and flexibility. On one side, it is the identity of the organization that creates order and stability inside the HEO (Labianca, Fairbank, Thomas, & Gioia, 2001). On the other hand, identity has also been found to provide HEOs with considerable flexibility they need during strategic change processes to cope with their increasingly turbulent external environment (Fumasoli et al., 2015). Thus, it seems that OI can create this link between change and stability. However, there is a lack of research in examining the reflection of both change and continuity in the OI of HEOs. This study is an attempt to fill in this gap in the literature.

The previous discussion of OI reveals that this concept is significantly related to the debate about change in higher education. All types of HEOs have been influenced by their changing external environment; however, the focus of this research is on private not-for-profit LACs. These institutions have been found to be disproportionately affected by the turbulent

environment of higher education (Baker et al., 2012; Breneman, 1990). In these colleges, the conflict between sticking to the traditional identity or responding to the need for innovation in this identity is well reflected in the current literature. In the following section, I first give an overview of what are LACs and their historical and educational significance in American higher education. Then, the different challenges these institutions have been facing is reviewed. This is followed by the various changes they have implemented in response to those challenges with a focus on adding professional programs as the most controversial change. Finally, the different perspectives of interpreting this change, based on the views of the old and new institutional theory, are discussed.

Private Liberal Arts Colleges

Characteristics and Importance

Specific characteristics and attributes are attached to the segment of private LACs. One of the most common definition of these institutions is the one developed by Breneman (1990). In an attempt to distinguish this type of institutions from other categories of postsecondary institutions, Breneman (1990) developed certain educational and economic criteria for categorizing private LACs. According to his description, these colleges award 40% or more on liberal arts fields, are small in size, provide residential life, and enroll full-time students in the traditional-college-age. Providing services for a specific student population, i.e., being exclusive and selective, and focusing on undergraduate students have also been highlighted in the literature as main characteristics of these colleges (Baker et al., 2012; Delucchi, 1997; Hoskins & Brown, 2017). Other qualities are also attributed to private LACs and can distinguish them from other types of HEO s. For example, Hoskins and Brown (2017) state that these colleges focus on building strong relationships with their current and prospective students. Others also add that one

of the unique characteristics of independent LACs is that they aim at developing the "whole person" through residential education (Hartley, 2017; Taylor & Weerts, 2017). Though these features are all viewed as part of the identity of private LACs, the focus on liberal education is considered as the core feature that constitutes the identity of these institutions (Breneman, 1990; Baker et al., 2012; Baker & Baldwin, 2015; Delucchi, 1997; Freeland, 2009; Kraatz & Zajac, 1996).

In regard to their financial characteristics, LACs are described as more cost inefficient, which means that these colleges provide the same services of other postsecondary institutions but spending more on these services (Hoskins & Brown, 2017). The economic criterion of Breneman (1990) for distinguishing these colleges is that they have comparable revenue and cost structure. They are tuition-dependent and their market is described as "high performing and high income" (Hartley, 2017; Hoskins & Brown, 2017). The levels of tuition fees of some of them are considered relatively higher than other types of institutions (Baker et al., 2012; Delucchi, 1997). They are private because they have an independent governing system (Taylor & Weerts, 2017). This makes them able to have certain values (e.g., religious values) in their missions that are not possible in state colleges or universities (Breneman, 1990).

Although these features are considered as the main characteristics LACs share, there is also diversity among these colleges. They exhibit distinctiveness in some other features. For example, among this class of institutions there are the ones with religious affiliations, with no religious affiliations, HBCUs colleges, women's colleges, and urban or rural colleges (Hartley, 2017). They also differ in their resources and selectivity levels, with some described as highly selective and exclusive while others are not selective or less selective (Tarrant et al., 2018). In regard to the change of their curriculum, they are also different in the extent to which they have

changed this curriculum. Some of them are still characterized as “arts and science focus” while others are classified as balancing between professional degrees and arts and science. This similarity and distinctiveness in their characters make this type a good fit for the purpose of this research. Their shared identity as a category in one field reflects similarity among them while their differences in student population, selectivity or affiliations reflects the distinctiveness among their individual identities.

Private not-for-profit LACs are considered a vital component of American higher education. Since the founding of the U.S., this form of higher education has had a significant role to play in the history of American higher education (Baker & Baldwin, 2015) and in the country as a whole (Hartley, 2017). Historically, the initial purpose behind the foundation of small private colleges was to serve the public good (Taylor & Weerts, 2017). Those colleges are described in the history of higher education as the colonial colleges, the oldest and distinctive form of American higher education, whose main purpose was to graduate students, used to be only White Christian men, who would work in public affairs and become leaders of the society (Thelin, 2004). Educating members of the society and preparing them to participate in the democratic society is one of the main contributions of higher education to the public good (Labaree, 1997), and this was what private colleges doing. Thus, though they are private, they have been playing a crucial role in serving the public by promoting democratic principles and preparing leaders of the society (Taylor & Weerts, 2017).

Some believe that this historical role and contribution of private LACs are still continuing and can be reflected in several aspects. For example, Hoskins and Brown (2017) report that the extant literature demonstrates that the high quality education provided by these colleges yield better student outcomes in aspects like critical thinking, responsibility and leadership skills.

Moreover, Taylor and Weerts (2017) highlight several aspects of the education provided at these colleges as manifestations of the continuous contributions of these colleges to society. For example, they sate that the general education in the liberal arts fields, which is considered as one of the main features of private colleges, provide citizens with equal learning opportunities in these main areas, which they need for their participation in society. Also, they argue that one of the main goals of these institutions is the "whole person" development; thus, beside the curriculum of liberal arts, students are provided with extra-curricular activities outside the classroom which help them in developing the different aspects of their personalities. Moreover, civic engagement, another part of the learning services provided by these colleges, is considered another contribution of private LACs to the public good. It is based on the concept of encouraging students to be engaged in off-campus community services (Freeland, 2009). Through this participation democratic values can be fostered, active citizenship habits are cultivated, and students are trained for professions in real community settings (Freeland, 2009; Taylor & Weerts, 2017).

The distinctiveness of this type of HEOs is also considered as an important aspect with which it contributes to the higher education system. Some believe that private LACs, with their distinctive features, are enhancing the institutional diversity of the American higher education system (Breneman, 1990; Tarrant, et al., 2018; Taylor & Weerts, 2017). Diversity is considered as one of the unique and valued characteristics of American postsecondary education. This diversity is reflected in how different HEIs have different purposes, programs, services, sizes, admission requirements and reaching different student populations (Harris, 2013). This diverse system provides students, who are looking for higher education options with more choices and complementary opportunities that can enhance their chances of accessing higher learning (Harris,

2013; Morphew, 2002). Small private LACs are contributing to this diversity in the system. Their focus on liberal arts degrees and on undergraduate students, their small size, and their selectivity provide more flexibility in institution types and increase the options for students looking for specialized institutional type (Tarrant, et al., 2018). Moreover, their unique mission (Morphew & Hartley, 2006) is considered as a contribution to the diversity of American higher education's missions, especially with the increase in mission homogenization, i.e., "mission creep", among HEIs (Gonzales, 2013).

Private LACs are also playing a significant role in increasing the access opportunities for higher education students. These colleges are providing access to millions of students seeking knowledge in higher education (Tarrant et al., 2018). A large number of these students are from underserved students population (Taylor & Weerts, 2017). Tarrant et al., (2018) report the results of a study done by the Brookings Institute which shows that the share of small private colleges in serving low-income students is similar to that of public colleges.

Though many still believe in these significant roles and contributions of small private LACs to the American higher education system and the society, these colleges have been facing several challenges that make others in doubt of their role, viability and even their survival. These challenges are due to the changes in the cultural, economic, and social conditions around these institutions. The following section presents these pressures and difficulties this type of tertiary institutions has been facing for decades. This is followed by the various changes and transformations occurring at those colleges in response to those difficulties.

Challenges

Almost three decades ago, Breneman (1990) warned that the survival of the small private LACs was in doubt due to a number of challenges they were facing. However, the discussions of

the changing conditions that challenge these colleges occurred earlier in the literature. Tarrant et al., (2018) report studies dated back to 1940s, 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, with warnings of the anticipated demise of private LACs. One of the most recognized research report in this regard is the one done by Astin and Lee (1972) about the situation of a group of small private LACs in 1972. After this report, lots of research has been conducted predicting and warning that this type of institutions is disappearing (Baker et al., 2012; Breneman, 1990; Delucchi, 1997; Jaquette, 2013; Taylor & Morphew, 2010). Thus, the vulnerability of this type of HEIs and the risks they are facing have become common discussions among educators and scholars of higher education. Years passed on and the changing cultural, economic, and social conditions are still challenging this sector of higher education institutions with its historical distinctiveness and traditional roles.

One of the main challenges private LACs have been facing is the cultural skepticism regarding the benefits and outcomes of their education (Wells, Guthrie, & Custer, 2017). Since 1980s, neoliberalism has occurred as a new ideology of viewing higher education (McMahon, 2017). The emergence of this ideology has resulted in a move away from the social relationship between higher education and society. The spread of this ideology has led to the view of education as social mobility (Labaree, 1997); even the social and intellectual benefits that higher education provides to an individual should be weighted in this way, according to this ideology (McMahon, 2017). Consequences of the neoliberal ideology include colleges and universities not viewed as social institutions, but as industrial firms with market-based goals and values. The value of education has become myopic; the focus has become on the economic value or outcome associated with the attained degree (Wells, et al., 2017). One of the impacts of the spread of this ideology on LACs is that the economic benefits and employment outcomes of liberal arts education, provided by these colleges, have been questioned; therefore, the belief in the

worthiness and value of this segment of higher education has decreased (Pifer, Baker, & Lunsford, 2019; Wells et al., 2017). The less interest in LACs is due to the fact that students are seeking educational credentials that provide them with direct financial benefits, not broad general education (Baker et al., 2012). Thus, private LACs have found themselves need to work hard in order to demonstrate their worth to policymakers and to students' families. Marketing has also contributed to this challenge. Higher education students are now viewed as customers; colleges and universities are competing in attracting more of these customers by providing them with their different needs and interests (Hoskins & Brown, 2017). Thus, instead of focusing on their traditional missions and in order to survive in this competitive market, LACs have found themselves in need to cope with this change and insert some adaptations to their strategic planning and actions (Hoskins & Brown, 2017).

The other challenge private LACs have been facing is a financial one. The continuous decrease in student interest in joining these colleges has become one of the main challenges they have been encountering over the last few decades (Baker, et al., 2012; Delucchi, 1997). Of course with less enrollment, these colleges have started struggling with financial disadvantages reflected in their cost control. This has led to the conflict between decreasing their fees and maintaining their quality of education. The levels of tuition fees of private LACs are considered relatively higher than other types of postsecondary institutions (Baker et al., 2012; Delucchi, 1997). Hoskins and Brown (2017) state that the distinctive student engagement learning experience provided by these colleges cost them more because of their resource disadvantages and scale inefficiencies; compared to other HEOs. Private LACs are spending more dollars to provide the same services. The revenue and cost structures of LACs are comparable (Breneman, 1990). Decreasing their tuition fees and enrolling more students than they usually do may reduce

the per-student cost and help them overcome this financial disadvantage; however, some believe that this will have negative impact on the quality of their education (Hoskins & Brown, 2017; Taylor & Weerts, 2017). Compared to other HEOs, these colleges find it difficult to balance the maintenance of quality and cost management (Taylor & Weerts, 2017). Taylor and Weerts (2017) claim that the "whole person" development is considered as one of the main financial challenges that these colleges are currently facing. They explain that spending money on inside-classroom teaching and learning and outside-classroom activities for the development of the "whole person" make these colleges suffer from a "diseconomy of scope", which refers to an economic disadvantage results from trying to do many things at the same time. They add that this problem can be solved by focusing on only in-class teaching, but this means compromising one of the main educational goals of these colleges. Another resource disadvantage private LACs face is related to their human resources. These colleges are struggling with finding, recruiting, and retaining qualified faculty members due to the fact that most of faculty are receiving education and training in research universities which have different institutional context (Taylor & Weerts, 2017).

Moreover, employability and the demands of the market for graduates with highly specialized knowledge are considered another challenging condition private LACs are encountering. These colleges are struggling with keeping this balance between their original mission of educating responsible engaged citizens, through liberal arts education, and adding professional education to their curriculum (Baker & Baldwin, 2015). This struggle to balance their competing values of keeping their history represented in their liberal arts degrees, and having innovation by adding professional training to their offerings has become the most common argument in the current literature of higher education (Hartley & Schall, 2005).

Examples of the fastest jobs in the current labor market are in data analysis, graphic design, and programming; these majors are not the original mission of LACs (Schneider & Sigelman, 2018). The higher unemployment rate of liberal arts graduates compared to other bachelor's degree holders- almost 8.5% compared to 7.5% for college graduates overall (Sigelman, 2016)- of course make leaders of these LACs concerned about the change they need to add to their offered degrees.

Globalization is also considered another challenge for this type of postsecondary education. The impact of global economy, the need for global knowledge, and the demand for graduates who are ready for the global market make the traditional mission and education of these colleges less desirable (Johnson & Mansur, 2017). Internationalization has become a demand in HEOs (Albatch & Knight, 2007). This demand is quite challenging for private LACs with their limited resources and their national curriculum (Johnson & Mansur, 2017). Some argue that these colleges need to make a radical shift in their missions, making them more international, in order to survive in the current global market of higher education (Johnson & Mansur, 2017).

Moreover, changing demographics and the call for enhancing equity and inclusion are also influencing LACs. Thus, the exclusivity of these colleges has become another challenge. Some argue that this exclusivity, represented in their historical missions (e.g., being religious or an HBCU) or serving students from wealthy families, are in contradiction with the increasing diversity of society. Looking for students with certain identities might not help those colleges in their efforts to overcome their enrollment difficulties (Weerts & Taylor, 2017).

With all of the previous challenges and difficulties private LACs have been encountering, their leaders have found themselves forced to respond to those challenges by initiating and

implementing several different changes in their campuses. Those changes have taken different forms and have been of different levels and depths. In the following section, a review of some of the main changes that have occurred in this segment of higher education. More focus is in discussing the change of including professional education as the most controversial and critical one. This leads to the discussion of the conflict in the way this changes is understood and interpreted in the literature.

Changes in Response to Challenges

Because the landscape of American postsecondary education has transformed, as has been discussed earlier, small private not-for profit LACs have also changed (Hartley, 2017). The extant literature represents an explicit theme that private LACs are changing their structures, practices and/or symbols in response to the challenges presented in the previous section (Tarrant et al., 2018). Leaders of these colleges have found themselves in need to respond to the highly competitive market, the focus on vocational education, and their shaky financial status by implementing some changes in their organizations. Moreover, questions and concerns have been raised about their survival, their stability, and their soundness (Breneman, 1990; Baker et al., 2012; Tarrant et al., 2018). Those colleges differ in the way they respond and in the level of which they are influenced by these challenges ranging from closures and reopening, like Antioch, Sweetbriar (Pifer et al., 2019), Dowling, and Burlington (Johnson & Mansur, 2017) to a refusal to change their traditional mission and core characteristics (Hoskins & Brown, 2017). Some argue that these changes have made the characteristics of LACs not applicable to some of those colleges. For example, Baker and Baldwin (2015) report that from the 212 liberal arts colleges characterized by Breneman (1990) 25 years ago, only 130 remain as liberal arts colleges based on the defining criteria given by Breneman (1990).

Some of the changes occurring at private LACs can be described as changes in the defining attributes of these colleges and status. Some colleges have chosen to transform to a different status by changing their names from "college" to "university" to be like comprehensive universities (Jaquette, 2013; Morphew, 2002, 2009; Tarrant et al., 2018). For example, Finder (2005) reported that Beaver College in Glenside (PA) could increase its applications after becoming Arcadia University. Brown (2011) has also conducted a case study of the College of Charleston after transforming from being a private college to become a public one. He found that the change could help the institution to stay open and it was a cost-effective strategy. Tarrant et al., (2018) reported that other colleges have followed the same path of Charleston. Moreover, in an effort to increase their enrollment, some colleges make a transformation from being single-gender colleges to becoming co-educational ones (Moore, 2013). Others have also changed their religious affiliations (Tarrant et al., 2018).

In regard to their teaching/learning methods and educational services, some colleges have decided to develop technology-based teaching and learning by adding online teaching and online degrees (Straumsheim, 2014). Moreover, some private LACs have changed their traditional inside-classroom teaching by complementing it with outside-classroom learning techniques, like service learning (Freeland, 2009). Focusing on undergraduate degree programs is considered as one of the main characteristics of these colleges. This characteristic has also been impacted as some of LACs started adding graduate programs to their offerings (Jaquette, 2013). Also, in order to increase enrollment and operating revenues, leaders of some of those colleges decided to add athletic programs to their student services (Bauer-Wolf, 2018).

Other survival transformations have included changes in the strategic practices and actions of these colleges. Examples of these strategies are adaptations in their enrollment and

selectivity (Tarrant et al., 2018), financial plans (Lipka, 2007), and creating new financial approaches (Seltzer, 2017). Changes in the marketing approaches and strategies of some of those colleges have also been reported (Hartley & Morphew, 2008; Saichaie & Morphew, 2014). Collaboration with other organizations is also another change strategy followed by some of those institutions (Baker & Baldwin, 2015). Others have joined other exclusive private institutions (Baker et al., 2012; Jaschik, 2010; Tarrant et al., 2018). Moreover, some residential LACs have made business of themselves by forming a for-profit subsidiary in order to generate more income (Blumenstyk, 2008). Building partnerships with industry is also another innovative strategy followed by some of these colleges to overcome their financial struggle (Supiano, 2011).

In response to globalization, some LACs have started to enroll more international students, make changes in their missions to adjust to the globalized economy, offer various international courses, and emphasize education abroad (Johnson & Mansur, 2017). Johnson and Mansur (2017) have given examples of two liberal arts colleges whose leaders have implemented several internationalization initiatives in their campuses. The authors found that these changes had positive impacts on the institutional global images of these two colleges. Some of these strategies included weaving internationalization in the mission and core values of the institution. Although studies show that the attempts made by HEOs to globalize their programs and services do not have positive impacts on their revenues, these internationalization efforts can improve their competitiveness, prestige, and visible positions among other institutions (Albatch & Knight, 2007).

Although all of the previous changes have been documented in the literature, adding professional programs to the academic degrees offered at LACs is considered the most critical and controversial transformation at this segment of HEOs. There is a clear evidence in the

literature that private LACs have made a change in their curriculum by developing vocational programs, including health, business and/or computer science (Baker et al., 2012; Kraatz & Zajac, 1996). Thirty years ago, Breneman (1990) reported the increase in the number of private LACs, which have adapted their academic programs by adding more professional degrees. This adaptation has decreased the number of colleges which could be identified as LACs based on their curriculum from nearly 600 to 212. Twenty years later, Baker and her colleagues (2012) replicated the study of Breneman and found that the number of colleges which could be categorized as LACs based on their degrees decreased to 130 colleges. This change in the curriculum has also been reported in other studies (Morphew, 2002; Delucchi, 1997; Kraatz & Zajac, 1996).

This study focuses on the interpretation of this particular change and how the OI analysis can be used to describe its nature, its direction and consequences. The focus on this change is due to the fact that it is considered as a core change apparently related to the identity of these colleges (Kraatz & Zajac, 1996). Although private LACs, as have been previously discussed, are categorized by a number of unique features, their liberal education curriculum is considered as the main essential feature of these colleges (Baker & Baldwin, 2015; Kraatz & Zajac, 1996). The history and tradition of these colleges are quite associated with their emphasis on liberal arts not professional programs (Stark & Lowther, 1988; Brint et al., 2005). This traditional education has been valued very highly in the American higher education system (Breneman, 1990). Although the trend toward more vocational education has been noticed in all types of HEOs (Brint et al., 2005), having LACs moving toward this trend reflects a more notable tension between the traditional identity and the need for change in response to the dynamic environment (Baker & Baldwin, 2015). Having more career-oriented programs has been seen as a move away from the

traditional identity of these colleges and their traditional mission. Moreover, this change has been found to be influencing other important aspects of the college, including their culture, admission policies and resource allocations (Kraatz & Zajac, 1996). It has also impacted the missions and names of these colleges- a reidentification of their identity (Morphew, 2002; Taylor & Morphew, 2010). Finally, and most importantly, this change has been particularly connected to the principles of institutional theory in the literature; it has been described as the most illegitimate change in some studies and the most legitimate one in other studies (Delucchi, 1997; Kraatz & Zajac, 1996; Morphew, 2002). It has portrayed as a convergence leading to more isomorphism (Morphew, 2009) and a divergent change representing the distinctive characters of colleges (Kraatz & Zajac, 1996). These different interpretations related to the two versions of institutional theory and their relations to the concept of OI is discussed in the following section.

Different Perspectives of Change in LACs

The previous discussion indicates that there is a clear theme in the literature that private LACs are changing in response to several different environmental factors. Although scholars have discussed changes occurring in enrollment, financial plans, and student population, the main concern and controversy are about adding professional programs to the curriculum of these colleges. This change has been the focus of lots of research and created a long-standing debate about its nature, direction, and consequences on this sector in particular and on the American higher education in general (Breneman, 1990; Baker et al., 2012; Baker & Baldwin, 2015; Brint et al., 2005; Delucchi, 1997; Ferrall, 2011; Hartley, 2003; Jaquette, 2013; Kraatz & Zajac, 1996; Morphew, 2002; Stark & Lowther, 1988; Taylor, Cantwell, & Slaughter, 2013). When trying to describe and interpret the change of curriculum in private LACs, research findings have revealed different interpretations. These interpretations have different perspectives in regard to what is

driving this change and what it leads to. The different perspectives reflect the contradiction between the new institutional theory and its classic version.

A group of studies have described adding professional programs to the curriculum of private LACs as a change driven by the need of seeking legitimacy and survival in the new competitive landscape of higher education (Breneman, 1990; Delucchi, 1997; Jaquette, 2013; Morphew, 2002). The findings of these studies support the main principle of the new institutional theory that the standard practices of the field influence the organizational behaviors of the individual organisations (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). LACs must adopt the normative forms, symbols, and/or practices in their field to be seen as legitimate by important external constituents (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). With the increase interest of students in job-oriented programs, having professional programs in the curriculum of LACs would be one of the normative standards that these institutions must acquire. As LACs make changes in their programs by adding more professional programs to their curriculum, they are doing so to become more popular and more legitimate in their organizational field (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). Thus, based on the institutional theory, change, like pursuing more professional programs, occurs not mainly to serve a present need, but to adopt a new model of other institutions perceived as having the most prestige and highest status (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). Moreover, in the neo-institutionalism, private LACs constitute an organizational field in which they share constraints and opportunities. Since these organizations face similar opportunities and pressures placed on them within their field, their organizational behaviors are expected to be similar. Thus, isomorphism will be the result of the adoption of similar processes by these individual organizations (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

These premises of institutional theory have got some support from the findings of a group

of studies that focused on examining change in the curriculum of LACs. When finding that there was an increase in the number of LACs which chose to add professional programs to their curriculum, Breneman (1990) described this change as being driven by the need of these colleges to become more popular. Morphew (2002) also presented results that many actors in the field of LACs viewed having professional programs as the way colleges could increase or grow their prestige. Leaders of those colleges do not want to take the risk of becoming less legitimate by staying too far away from what is normative in their field (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). As a result, the change of LACs' curriculum has implied the adoption of an "institutionally conforming structure" that would result in an increase in the organization's legitimacy (Delucchi, 1997; Morphew, 2002; Jaquette, 2013). This conformity has also caused some kind of decoupling the external structural of the college from the actual internal technical core practices (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). For example, Delucchi (1997) found that many LACs continued to emphasize a liberal arts academic mission, as a way of looking more legitimate, despite providing most of their degrees in professional programs. In regard to the consequence of this change, some empirical evidence supported the claim of viewing this change as a convergence leading to more similarity among these institutions (Morphew, 2009).

On the other hand, another group of studies have come up with findings that contradicted the previous view. According to this group, this change was explained as a natural evolution these institutions are going through (Baker & Baldwin, 2015; Hartley, 2003; Tarrant et al., 2018). It is more of a predictable transformation made by these colleges in their programs to serve the new needs and demands of the higher education market. Thus, it is not that symbolic change made to attain legitimacy, but it is a real change made at these institutions and it reflects their current organizational realities (Kraatz & Zajac, 1996). This group of researchers found that

this change was directed by the core mission and the internal technical environments of each college (Baker et al., 2012; Hartley, 2003; Kraatz & Zajac, 1996).

This view gives more support to the claims of the classic institutional theory. According to this theory, private LACs are likely to behave in a manner consistent with their traditional mission and change is expected to proceed according to that mission (Selznick, 1957). The explicit rules and values of the college play a significant role in guiding this change (DiMaggio & Powell 1991; Selznick, 1996). This means that when private LACs add professional programs to their curriculum, their unique mission and institutional goals should direct this change. The formal structures of the organizations are also considered useful tools for achieving the clearly defined goals of the change (Leslie et al., 2012). Change in the curriculum is viewed as effective and rational responses to pressures and challenges LACs are facing. Moreover, although almost all private LACs are adding more professional programs to their curriculum, differences between these institutions would still be recognized as a result of the unique different cultural context of each college (Selznick, 1957).

The literature indicates some support to this perspective of the classic institutional theory in interpreting change. The increase percentage in professional programs and less degrees in liberal arts is interpreted as an academic evolution in mission and intellectual coherence of this type of HEOs (Baker et al., 2012). The study of Kraatz and Zajac (1996) was one of the early studies that came with findings that contradicted the principles of legitimacy, convergence, and homogeneity of the new institutional theory. The results of this study gave more support to the old institutionalism (Clark, 1972; Selznick, 1957). When analyzing the development of professionalization of curriculum of private LACs for 15 years, the authors of this study found no proof for convergence to the normative forms in the development of curriculum among the

examined colleges. While the new institutionalism highlights that the change occurs in institutions is a symbolic one (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991), the results of this study contradicted this assumption by showing that there was a real change taking place at those colleges. Moreover, the local and technical environments of different colleges were found to be playing significant roles in the change of the curriculum. The result of this change in the curriculum was that the examined colleges became less, rather than more, homogeneous over time. The findings of this quantitative study were also supported by another qualitative study that focused on exploring the change process at three LACs (Baker & Baldwin, 2015). The three colleges varied in the degree of adding professional programs to their curriculum; however, they were all existing at the same macro-level environment. The findings of this study indicated that all the three institutions were aiming at seeking balance between internal and external challenging environments. However, each college pursued different path to reach that balance. The changes occurred at the three colleges also varied in their focus and impacts. Some impacts were peripheral while others were on central programming. For example, one college took their internal core values and mission to direct and guide the changes in their curriculum. Another college made some complementary and gradual changes based on their prior strategic plans. The third one preferred to focus on external efforts and building partnership to help them deal with external influence. Though curricular reform can have a significant impact on the main purpose of the college, the unique internal culture of each college was found to play a crucial role in creating this new purpose, which is different from one college to another (Hartley, 2003).

The above contradictory findings indicate that both versions of institutional theory could not provide a convincing description of curriculum change in private LACs. As mentioned earlier, the reconciliation between the two perspectives using the OI concept has been proposed

to provide a better understanding of change in higher education. Interestingly, the previous discussion indicates these two versions of the theory have addressed OI and how it is changed; however, they differ in their perspectives. According to the new institutional theory, OI exists in the formal structure and the normative image prevailing in the field (Stensaker, 2004). It is a social external entity that the college must adapt to (Gioia et al., 2013). This identity is usually inspired by popular external ideas in the environment on how the college should look like (Stensaker, 2015). Thus, the change in the curriculum of LACs is viewed as a purposeful adaptation in the OI of these institutions. This adaptation has been primarily inspired by external popular ideas of the type of education these colleges should offer. There is a support for this claim in the literature of LACs. Some researchers reported that the OI of the LAC has always been found as inspired by external ideas about what a legitimate LAC should look like, which potentially lead to shifting identities over time (Brint et al., 2005). Moreover, the change in curriculum is viewed as a designed change by LACs in response to the changing environment in which they exist to better their profile to external stakeholders. This designed change may lead to a radical shift in the OI of the institution (Stensaker, 2015). The findings of some studies gave support to this claim too. Adding more professional programs to the curriculum of LACs was described as a radical change in the distinctive identity and character of a LAC (Breneman, 1990). LACs were seen as switching into another type of institution, called "the small professional college", which affects the sense of their shared values and core mission (Breneman, 1990; Delucchi, 1997). Others found that the new more legitimate identity LACs are seeking when changing their curriculum was the "comprehensive university" (Morphew, 2002; Jaquette, 2013). According to this view, the change of identity is not directed inward, toward specific organizational actors or programs, but outward at the shifting interests of applicants,

accreditation agencies, college rating guides, and other public constituencies (Delucchi, 1997; Morphew & Hartley, 2006). This perspective of the new institutional theory shows how the concept of OI is seen as fluid and easily changeable to the dynamics in a given organizational field (Fumasoli et al., 2015). In this context, OI is a strategic tool used in legitimizing the need for change or adaptation (Fumasoli et al., 2015; Stensaker, 2015).

Contrary to this interpretation of OI, the classic institutional theory views this concept as a unique character the college develops over time as it transforms into an institution (Selznick, 1957). This character emerges from the internal organizational life of the college in which various constituents are interacting (Stensaker, 2004). Thus, it is not that external image the college adapts to; it is a true, stable and distinctive reality of the college (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Stensaker, 2015). This view is best reflected in the work of Clark (1970, 1972), in which distinctive LACs are viewed as evolving through a step-wise natural development which leads to the establishment of the OI with all its myths and sagas. From this perspective, change in offered programs takes place at LACs through default where the internal factors of each LAC play a key role in directing this change (Kraatz & Zajac, 1996; Hartley, 2003). The result of is more of an organic change in the OI of the LAC which makes it distinctive in its values and character (Baker & Baldwin, 2015; Clark, 1972).

The two versions represent two different perspectives of what OI is and how it is changed. On one hand, it is stable, distinctive, and represents the internal cultural values and assumptions of the organization. On the other hand, it is fluid, inspired by external expectations and similar to the identities of other organizations in the field. However, the actual conceptualization of OI, as discussed earlier, reveals that this concept combines the two views of the institutional theory. It has an interactive relationship with external influences and internal life

of the organization (Weerts et al., 2014). It also implies both the distinctiveness and similarity of the organization in relation to other organizations (Corley et al., 2006). Moreover, both change and stability are presented as two elements in the conceptualization of OI (Stensaker, 2015). Thus, since applying the two versions of the theory to explain changes in LACs reveals that each one has specific strengths and weaknesses, this makes OI a more promising way to think about the theories' percepts and how they apply to LACs. This nature and role of OI is clearly reflected in the organizational identity dynamic model developed by Hatch and Schultz (2002). This model is used as the theoretical framework that guides this research. In the following section, this framework is presented and explained.

Theoretical Framework

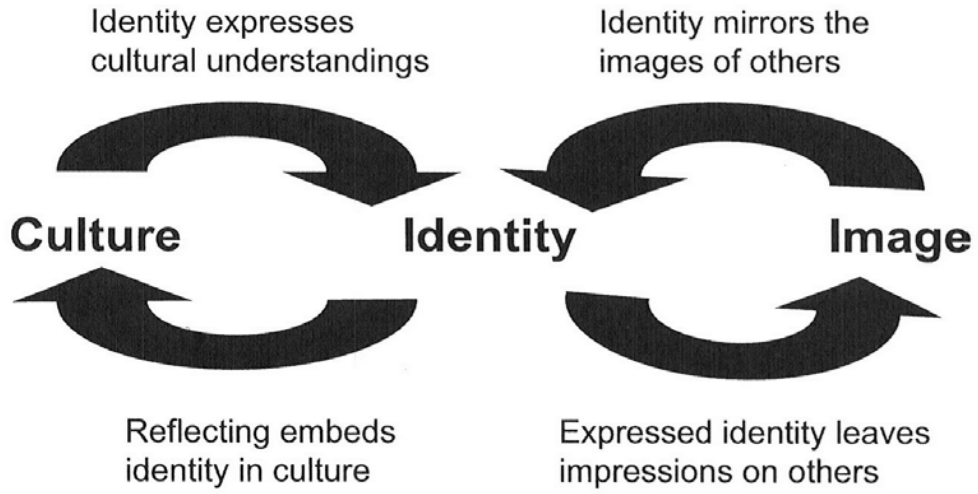
In this study, the organizational identity dynamic model of Hatch and Schultz (2002) is used as a theoretical framework to guide the analysis of the OIs of a group of private LACs. I believe this framework is particularly appropriate for this study because it encapsulates the conflicting views of OI change in the new and old institutional theory. The model views OI as related to both the internal definition of the organization's self (referred to as culture) and the external definition of the organization's self (referred to as image). Moreover, it explains the process of OI change in relation to both internal and external influences. It also demonstrates how the OI of an institution can be both distinctive from and similar to other OIs. This model has been used in several empirical studies since it has been designed.

Hatch and Schultz (2002) formulated their model based on Mead's theory of individual identity, in which identity has two distinguishable phases: the "me" and the "I". At the organizational level, the outsiders' (external stakeholders) image of the organization is what forms the "Me" part of the identity. The organizational "I" is the organizational understandings

(values, beliefs, and assumptions) that constitute the organizational culture of the institution. The identity is a simultaneous synthesis of both phases. In other words, the "I" and "me" both constitute the identity of an organization as it appears in social experience. Thus, instead of seeing the identity as wholly cultural (Who we are) or wholly imagistic (How others see us), it is conceived as related simultaneously to both views.

Figure 1

Organizational Identity Dynamic Model



Note. Adapted from Hatch & Schultz (2002). The dynamics of organizational identity. *Human Relations, 55*, 989–1018.

According to Hatch & Schultz (2002), culture and image also influence each other and the continuous interaction between them is what forms, maintain, and change the OI. They present a dynamic set of four processes through which the OI is constituted where both culture and image are interrelated. The four processes are mirroring, reflecting, expressing and impressing. The description of each process, as explained by Hatch and Schultz (2002), is as follows:

Mirroring

In this process, organizations, like LACs, mirror their identity in the images others hold about them. This means the OI of the college is reflected in a mirror held up by the opinions and views of the outsiders. The opinions of the college's external stakeholders reflected in this image motivate members of the college to get involved in assessing and interpreting issues that might impact the stakeholders' opinion of their college and take necessary actions. The actions may vary between either changing their image or changing their identity. Another important impact of mirroring is that the images of the stakeholders leak into the OI of the college. This is due to the effects of access by which external stakeholders cross the organizational boundary. This part of the OI dynamic reflects the new institutional theory view of OI change as being inspired by external stimuli and gaining more legitimate image in the field (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991).

Reflection

The image organizational members see when mirroring their college's identity does not lead to immediate action based on that image. This image would also prompt those members to examine the internal unique context of their college and reflect on what is the real definition of their college. Thus, the mirrored image they see will be interpreted based on the existing cultural understandings of their college. This reflection on their cultural values and beliefs will determine the actions that will be taken in regard to identity change or reinforcement. This means that this reflection embeds the identity in the existing organizational culture which will then be associated with the identity statements. Thus, the development of the OI is not done only through mirroring the image that others hold about the organization, but also the process of self-examination and reflection is critical in this dynamics. The focus on the role of the internal organizational culture

(Selznick, 1957) in OI change emphasized by the classic institutional theory is highlighted in this process.

Expressing

While reflection is the process through which organizational members speak about the identity of their college to themselves, expression is the process in which this identity is expressed to the outsiders. The explicit claims about the identity of the organization usually carry with them some of the cultural meaning in which they are embedded as a result of the previous process. This means culture is embodied in identity statements which are used to as symbols to express who the college is. This cultural self-expression includes any and all references to the collective identity of the organization. In this light, the expressed identity of LACs will reveal the distinctive values and beliefs of each college (Clark, 1972).

Impressing

The expressed identity of an organization does not only include the collective's expression of organizational culture, it should also leave impression on others. In this impressing process, the organizational members work on projecting images of their organization to their stakeholders. The goal is to stimulate the awareness of these stakeholders by considering their attention, interests, and involvement. This means that that produced identity claims will show consideration for what stakeholders want to see including the market demands and consumers' (students) preferences (Gioia et al, 2013). Since LACs which exist in the same field share the same demands and consumers, similarity in their projected images is expected (Morphew, 2002, 2009).

Hatch and Schultz (2002) state that the four processes continuously cycle within and between cultural self- understandings and images of outsiders. They also explain that the identity

mediates the relationship between the image and the culture in two ways. First, through the processes of mirroring and reflecting images influence the organizational culture. Second, the processes of expressing and impressing show how the culture impacts the images of the organization the stakeholders hold. Hatch and Schultz (2002) describe the dynamics of OI processes by stating that at any moment OI is the immediate result of interaction between organizational (cultural) self-expressions and mirrored stakeholder images. This is how OI is continuously created, sustained and changed." The result of this balanced dynamics is a healthy OI in which this identity will show integration of all relevant internal and external stakeholders and interests. Two dysfunctions may result from the disassociation between the internal culture and the external image of the organization. If OI is changed primarily in relation to organizational culture, the organization is vulnerable to organizational narcissism or self-absorption, and the loss of stakeholders' interest and support (Hatch & Schultz, 2002). On the other hand, if the organization ignores its cultural context by giving most of its attention to stakeholder images, OI is constructed mainly in relation to stakeholder images, the organization is vulnerable to hyper-adaptation (Hatch & Schultz, 2002). Both losing stakeholders' support and interests and hyper-adaptation are being considered as risks taken by LACs (Hearn & Ciarimboli, 2017).

The above framework was used to guide the analysis of the colleges' OIs to answer the following main questions of this research: 1) How have the organizational identities (OIs) that private not-for-profit liberal arts colleges (LACs) presented in their strategic plans changed or remained stable over time? 2) How are the internal and external interests of those colleges reflected in their OIs? 3) What are the distinctive features in the OIs of those colleges?

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

In this section, I discuss the methods which was applied to investigate the research questions. The research questions were the following: 1) How have the organizational identities (OIs) that private not-for-profit liberal arts colleges (LACs) presented in their strategic plans changed or remained stable over time? 2) How are the internal and external interests of those colleges reflected in their OIs? 3) What are the common (shared) and the distinctive features in the OIs of those colleges? To answer these questions, I employed a qualitative content analysis research methodology to examine the strategic plans of a sample of private-not-for-profit LACs. This analysis helped me to gain insights about the current OIs of LACs and to understand change in these identities.

The qualitative approach fit the overall purpose and questions of this research. As indicated above, this research focused on understanding organizational change at private LACs by analyzing their communicated OIs in their strategic plans over time. The analysis was more concerned with examining the communicated OI of each college in order to interpret change occurring in this segment of higher education. This interpretive approach of the study required a qualitative design (Creswell, 2012; Hess-Biber, 2017). Cassell and Symon (1994) state that the dynamics of organizational change are best studied by applying qualitative methods which are profound enough to allow the detailed analysis of change. Moreover, OI was viewed as the central phenomenon requiring exploration and understanding in this study. Considering the nature of my target phenomenon (i.e., OI), as being sensitive to the context of each college (Corley et al., 2006), the qualitative approach was more appropriate to obtain details about this concept that would be difficult to obtain through more conventional quantitative methods

(Ravasi & Canato, 2013). In addition, writing the report of this study required flexibility based on emerging themes and evaluative criteria (Creswell, 2012). This also required a qualitative research approach.

In the following sections, I first introduce content analysis as a research method, provide some background about this approach, and why it best fit the purpose and questions of this study. This is followed by a description of the selection of the sample colleges as well as the process for data collection from searching to verifying and organizing the strategic plans of the selected colleges. Then, the analysis procedure, which was an inductive one, is described and linked to each of the research questions. Finally, the multiple measures which were taken to ensure credibility, dependability, and transferability are discussed followed by the limitations of the study and my positionality as a researcher.

Qualitative Content Analysis

The method that was used for the present study was content analysis as described by Krippendorff (2013). Content analysis can be defined as "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (Krippendorff, 2013, p. 24). In other words, it is a method that is based on a systematic coding and categorizing of textual information to discover themes and patterns of the used words and try to understand their relationships based on their contexts (Grbich, 2013). In content analysis, the texts can be written texts, audio and/or visual media. Examples include books, TV shows, images, works of art, memos, sounds, minutes of meetings, policy documents, websites, census data, TV programs, letters, maps, diaries, signs, symbols, and/or numerical records (Grbich, 2013; Krippendorff, 2013). In this study, the texts were the written strategic plans of the selected LACs, which include their missions, values, visions, and goals, as they have developed

over time.

Content analysis is based on the assumption that the text, which is the starting point of this method, carries a meaning. This means that the text is created by someone to convey meanings for someone else, and these meanings, therefore, must not be overlooked (Krippendorff, 2013). Content analysis is used when the aim is to analyze texts in order to derive meanings from those texts, and build a model, or a conceptual map, to describe the phenomenon of the study (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). Through the use of content analysis, the researcher's goal is to dig deeper and focus on retrieving and analyzing documents for their significance and meaning in context (Grbich, 2013). The researcher would classify words used in the documents into fewer content- related categories, search for their context, and explanatory meanings, patterns, and processes (Grbich, 2013). Krippendorff (2013) state that content analysis can be characterized by three elements. First, it is an empirically grounded method, in which data is explored in order to derive inferences form it. Second, it goes beyond the superficial consideration of symbols and contents by focusing on adding significant meanings to them based on their cultural contexts. Third, it has its own methodology, which researchers can follow to plan for their analysis, execute it, report its findings and critically evaluate it.

The advantage of using this method is that it allows the researcher to examine theoretical issues and reach a deep understanding from the collected data (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). Although it is flexible in design, it is also considered as a scientific tool that requires a systematic reading of texts and following a specialized rigorous procedure that can lead to reliable and valid results (Krippendorff, 2013). Applying this technique will provide the researchers with new insights, enhance their understandings of a particular phenomenon, and guide to practical actions (Krippendorff, 2013). It is also useful when researchers need to examine and analyze a large

amount of textual data (Grbich, 2013).

The historical background of content analysis reveals that this method was traditionally viewed as a quantitative method. In the early twentieth century, the focus was on counting the frequency of words in hymns, newspaper and magazine articles, advertisements and political speeches (Elo & Kyngas, 2008; Mayring, 2000). The use of this method was broadened in the 1960s by being used in different disciplines including linguistics, psychology, sociology, history and arts; its procedures had also been refined (Mayring, 2000). During this time, objections were raised against the quantification of this approach and not paying attention to the context of the text and the latent contents (Mayring, 2000). Those criticisms led to the development of the qualitative approach to content analysis (Mayring, 2000), which was the approach of this study. Qualitative content analysis can be defined as an empirically grounded method which is mainly used for examining textual data within their context and deriving meanings and inferences to describe the studied phenomenon (Krippendorff, 2013). Thus, as a qualitative approach, it is a value-based, contextual, and interpretative process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this process, multiple realities exist and multifaceted perceptions of the phenomenon can be developed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

I have chosen content analysis as a method for this research for a number of reasons. First, because this study focused on examining the OIs of a group of LACs as they were communicated in their strategic plans (mission, vision, values, and goals), content analysis was well-suited to attend to these sources as they were composed of textual communication components (Krippendorff, 2013). The large volumes of textual data could be reduced into codable units and were then analyzed to discover the explicit and implicit themes and meanings within these data sources. Moreover, this approach fit the main focus of this research, which was

OI. OI as a topic, as described earlier, is highly contextualized. Content analysis is a suitable method that can handle a context sensitive matter and can process symbolic data collected from different communication sources (Krippendorff, 2013). This method is concerned with meanings, intentions, consequences, relationships, and cultural contexts (Elo & Kyngas, 2008; Grbich, 2013), which were the main focus of this research. In addition, the method has been used in other higher education studies which are similar to this research. It has been employed in studies exploring academic marketing textual and visual materials (Hartley & Morphew, 2008), in analyzing the strategic plans of HEIs (Fumasoli et al., 2015; Morphew et al., 2018), in examining mission statements of HEIs (Cho & Taylor, 2019) and in investigating how changing missions of HEIs are related to institutional beliefs and systems (Morphew & Hartley 2006; Taylor & Morphew 2010; Saichaie & Morphew 2014). Although qualitative content analysis was used in this study, this analysis was supplemented with descriptive data collected while constructing my sample.

Sample Selection

The background of private LACs presented in chapter two demonstrates how this segment of higher education has been experiencing tensions between their local culture with its traditional mission and external environmental pressures (Baker et al., 2012; Tarrant et al., 2018). As I discussed earlier, the addition of professional degrees to their traditional curriculum of liberal arts has been considered a change in the original identity of these institutions. These unique characteristics of private LACs and the contradiction of change description imply their relevance for studying OI change with its sources and outcomes. This was why the sample of this study was chosen from this type of HEOs.

The sample of this research was selected by applying a purposive sampling technique.

My objective was to sample those private colleges which can still be identified as LACs, albeit adding professional programs to their degrees. The reason behind this focus is that many private four-year colleges are now identified as baccalaureate colleges; however, not all baccalaureate colleges are liberal arts colleges (Delucchi, 1997; Taylor & Morphew, 2010). Thus, to navigate the heterogeneity of these organizations, it was first important to make sure that the sample represents private LACs since they are the focus of this study.

In order to identify private LACs colleges, I employed Breneman's (1990) definition of a LAC. In trying to define what a LAC is, especially after the various changes implemented in these colleges, Breneman (1990) set a number of characteristics to describe the main features of this type of HEOs. Those characteristics included awarding 40% or more of their degrees in traditional liberal arts education, being committed to residential life, being small in size (not more than 2500), and focusing on undergraduate student population. When applying those characteristics to the almost 600 colleges identified by the Carnegie Classification as "Liberal Arts Colleges," Breneman (1990) ended up with 212 colleges, which could be described as true LACs. The same standards were used twenty years later by Baker and her colleagues (2012), and the number shrunk to 130 colleges. Both studies found that the identified LACs have added professional programs to their curriculum; however, those colleges varied in the percentage of these degrees in their curriculum (Baker & Baldwin, 2015; Baker et al., 2012; Breneman, 1990).

I used these standards to search for private LACs in Carnegie Classification (2018). Carnegie classification is a typology of colleges and universities in the U.S., which classifies HEIs by categories. Within the Carnegie Classification system there is a separate and distinct category to which LACs belong; this category is called "Baccalaureate Colleges." They are identified as institutions that are primarily undergraduate colleges with major emphasis on

baccalaureate programs (Carnegie Classification, 2018). When I applied the standards of Breneman (1990) to this category, the results were 98 colleges.

The next step was to search among those 98 colleges for the ones that have strategic plans which are the main data sources for this study. The college was chosen if it had more than one strategic plan of different periods. Having a current strategic plan and an older one would allow me to compare how the OI of a college was presented in each time period. I therefore could examine change and stability in this identity over time. The colleges that did not have more than one strategic plan were not included in the sample since the aim of the analysis could not be achieved with one plan. This step led to a sample that included 11 private not-for-profit LACs.

I then used the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) to collect data about each college in order to see if enough variation existed among those colleges. The aim was to have a sample of colleges which can represent the variation that exist among private LACs in terms of their targeted students, their emphasis on professional programs, their religious affiliation, and their selectivity. Based on the collected data, I sought to include all the 11 colleges as a sample for this study. This sample fitted the purpose and questions of this research. The 11 colleges share similarities in regard to their focus on undergraduate teaching, small size, providing liberal arts education, and being residential. However, they also exhibit a host of different characteristics in terms of their undergraduate programs, their selectivity, their religious affiliation, and their targeted student population. Key characteristics of the sampled institutions are found in Table 1.

The table demonstrates that although the colleges focus on undergraduate teaching, all within the Carnegie classification's (2018) category of "No graduate coexistence" (NGC), they differ in their offers of liberal arts and professional degrees.

Table 1

Sample of 11 Private Not-For-Profit Liberal Arts Colleges

College	Location	Awards Offered	Campus Housing	Student Population	# of Applicants	Selectivity % Admitted	Carnegie Classification	Religious Affiliation	Carnegie Classification Curriculum	Racial Demographics
Agnes Scott (Women College)	GA Large Suburb	Bachelor's, Post baccalaureate certificates & Master's Degree	Yes	1067 (1005 Undergraduate)	1,751	65%	Selective	Presbyterian Church (USA)	Arts & Science plus profession	African American 31% White 31% Hispanic Latino 14%
Augustana College	IL Small City	Bachelor's & Master's Degree	Yes	2,113 (1,818)	2,224	67%	Selective	American Evangelical Lutheran Church	Balanced arts & sciences/professions	White 66% Hispanic Latino 11% Non-resident 12% African American 4%
Bennett College (HBCU) Women	NC Large City	Bachelor's	Yes	493	4384	59%	Inclusive	United Methodist	Arts & Science plus profession	African American 97% Other 3%
Dickinson College	PA Small City	Bachelor's	Yes	2,133 (all undergraduate)	6,426	40%	More Selective	No	Arts & sciences focus	White 63% Non-resident 14% Hispanic Latino 9% African 5%
Hampden-Sydney College Men College	VA Distant Rural	Bachelor's	Yes	993 (all undergraduate)	3,056	57%	Selective	No	Arts & Science plus profession	White 85% African American 5% Hispanic Latino 5% Asian 1%
Kalamazoo College	MI Small City	Bachelor's	yes	1,286 (all undergraduate)	3,576	76%	More Selective	No	Arts & sciences focus	White 55% Hispanic Latino 15% African American 7% Non-resident 8% Asian 7%

(table continues)

College	Location	Awards Offered	Campus Housing	Student Population	# of Applicants	Selectivity % Admitted	Carnegie Classification	Religious Affiliation	Carnegie Classification Curriculum	Racial Demographics
Lawrence University	WI Small City	Bachelor's	yes	1,442 (all undergraduate)	3,463	62%	More Selective	No	Arts & science focus	White 78% Non-resident 9% Hispanic Latino 6% African American 2%
Luther College	IW Remote Town	Bachelor's	yes	1,951 (all undergraduate)	4,108	62%	More Selective	American Evangelical Lutheran Church	Arts & sciences plus professions	White 60% Non-resident 12% Hispanic Latino 10% African American 6% Asian 6%
Randolph College	VA Small City	Bachelor's & Master's	Yes	617 (565 undergraduate)	1,177	90%	Inclusive	No	Arts & Science plus profession	White 60% Non-resident 12% Hispanic Latino 10% African American 6% Asian 6%
Wabash College	IN Distant Town	Bachelor's	Yes	867 (all undergraduate)	1,307	64%	More Selective	No	Arts & Science focus	White 76% Hispanic Latino 9% Non-resident 5%African American 4%
Whitman College	WA Small City	Bachelor's	Yes	1,579 (all undergraduate)	4,823	65%	More Selective	No	Arts & sciences focus	White 63% Non-resident 9% Hispanic Latino 8% African American 6% Asian 6%

Some are classified as “Arts and sciences focus, NGC”, which means at least 80 % of bachelor's degree majors are in the arts and sciences. Others are categorized as “Arts and sciences, plus professions, NGC”, which means 60–79 % of bachelor's degree majors are in the arts and sciences. The third group is identified as “Balanced arts and sciences/ professions, NGC”, which means bachelor's degrees awarded are relatively balanced between arts and sciences and professional fields (41–59 % in each).

The sample also included colleges which were expected to have more distinctive identities, such as a women’s college, an HBCU college, and religiously affiliated colleges. This variation helped in examining differences of internal values, historical backgrounds, and unique cultural aspects among colleges’ identities.

Moreover, the table also indicates differences between the colleges in their racial demographics. The colleges did not have the same level of racial diversity, which indicated differences in their exclusivity. For example, at Bennett, an HBCU, 97% of students identified as Black. Agnes Scott appeared more racially diverse than Hampden-Sydney, which appeared to remain a predominantly white LAC. These differences would help in answering the question related to the distinctiveness of the colleges’ OIs and whether they still emphasized or strayed away from their exclusivity.

The colleges also varied in terms of their selectivity; they range from being highly selective to being more inclusive. This variation in the sample was also substantial. Private LACs represent a clear pattern of stratification in terms of their financial health with some receiving large amounts of endowments while others getting little or no endowments (Taylor & Morphew, 2010). The richness of the college plays a crucial role in its admission selectivity. Wealthy LACs have the advantage of recruiting highly qualified students and be more selective than financially

disadvantageous colleges (Taylor & Morphew, 2010). Adopting professional programs was also found to be less likely in more selective and wealthy LACs (Delucchi 1997; Morphew, 2002). Having colleges of different selectivity and resource-richness allowed for describing how those colleges differ in their OIs and the tendency toward changing these identities or protecting them. This range of different colleges, which all shared the common characteristics of LACs, could provide me with insights into both the similarity and distinctiveness in the OIs of these colleges. They also implied differences in the internal values and needs and external demands of each college. The college that target specific student population, African American women for example, often emphasize certain values, which are not found in other LACs. Moreover, a highly selective well-resourced college may not have the same needs as the less advantageous more inclusive college.

I expected this sampling methodology to afford me maximum opportunities for the descriptive analysis of the OIs of theses colleges. This sampling method facilitated my attaining of as much variation as possible within my sample. The number of the colleges was also suitable for conducting content analysis. Existing research suggests working with a sample that is small when conducting a close, careful study of language (Merriam, 2009). The number was within the range of other similar studies in higher education literature, 4 and 12 HEOs (Fumasoli et at., 2015; Morphew & Saichaie, 2014).

Data Collection

Data was mainly collected via the strategic plans of the selected private LACs; however, other sources such as "About Us" pages on the colleges' websites and evaluation reports of some colleges were also considered. Strategic planning has become a very common process in colleges and universities (Morphew & Stensaker, 2018). I have chosen to collect data of this study from

the plans of the selected colleges for three reasons. First, the literature of higher education indicates that the OI of a college or university is communicated through their strategic plans (Fumasoli et al., 2015; Morphew et al., 2018). Particularly, this identity is articulated in these plans through the stated mission, values, and visions (Fumasoli et al., 2015). The mission is the articulation of the general purpose of organizational existence, for whom it exists, and the impact of its existence. It answers the question of "who we are?" as an organization. The analysis of mission statements of different HEOs and their connection to the identities of these institutions has been the focus of several studies in higher education (Kosmützky & Krücken, 2015; Morphew & Hartley, 2006; Taylor & Morphew, 2010). The core values are the important beliefs that drive the college; they are more related to the internal culture and factors of the college (Fumasoli et al., 2015). The strategic plans also include the vision, which can be considered as the future identity the college aspires to become in the near future. It is important because it represents a declaration of intentions of what to change or not to change (Fumasoli et al., 2015). Besides these three dimensions, I thought of also analyzing the goals stated in the plans. The goals included in the strategic plans are usually the specific objectives derived from the vision of the future. Analyzing those goals could help in clarifying the broad visions, specify what was important in terms of internal needs and external expectations, as well as how the change or stability in the identity have been planned. (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). The four dimensions of the strategic plans (mission, values, vision, and goals) were considered as clearly linked to the unique characteristics of the colleges, thus they represented an appropriate place to gauge the OI of these organizations (Morphew et al., 2018).

Moreover, strategic plans have two functions that are related directly to both the internal and external interests and demands of HEIs. They position the HEIs in the market by

demonstrating their considerations and compliance with external expectations and, thus, strengthening their external legitimacy (Fumasoli et al., 2015). At the same time, these plans are used as auto communication tools through which HEIs speak to themselves and their employees about their own distinctive purpose, long-term goals and reinforce their values (Fumasoli et al., 2015). Thus, they present a coherent narrative, which simultaneously shows compliance to the demands of certain key constituencies and paying respect to organizational values and features of the institution (Fumasoli et al., 2015; Morphew, et al., 2018). Thus, through the analysis of strategic plans, it would be possible to investigate the impact of both the external image and the internal culture in organizational change (Hatch & Schultz, 2002). As such, these documents appeared as particularly appropriate vehicles to assess how LACs described their efforts to balance potentially competing parts of their identities.

Strategic plans were also appropriate for this study because these plans often show how OI is managed and changed (Fumasoli et al., 2015). These documents are the tools used by organizations to plan for the change they want to implement, explaining this change, legitimating it in the eyes of stakeholders. Organizations need to define and redefine their identity in these plans in order to reconcile between conflicting needs (Fumasoli et al., 2015). Thus, how change in OI was presented and legitimated could be studied by analyzing the strategic plans of these colleges.

I obtained the strategic plans, the most recent and the older ones, from the websites of the selected LACs in fall 2020 (See Table 2). However, the older strategic plans of two colleges were available on Google links. I did not contact the colleges directly to obtain the documents. The other supported documents were also collected from the colleges' websites. All the 11 colleges had two strategic plans for two different periods of time; only one college (Dickinson

College) had three strategic plans and they were all included in the data. The strategic plans were quite different with respect to length; the number of pages ranged from 5 to 38 per plan. They also had different layouts; some looked like corporate booklets while others took the form of working documents. Some of the strategic plans had pictures (e.g., Bennett and Luther); others did not. In some plans, a click on some headings (e.g., vision) could take the reader to another page with some more details about that section. The missions, values, visions, and goals were the main parts to be analyzed in these documents to answer the research questions. These four dimensions were the parts through which the OI was presented and communicated. However, some colleges have included sections other than these four dimensions (e.g., introductions, messages from presidents, challenges, reflections on previous plans). All of these parts were also analyzed to add more clarification and explanation to the four main parts.

Table 2

Strategic Plans of the 11 Sampled Colleges

College	Strategic Plans Years
Agnes Scott College	(2009-2014) (2015-2020)
Augustana College	(For 2005) (for 2020)
Bennett College	(2012-2017) (2017-2022)
Dickinson College	(2006-2010) (2011-2015) (2016-2020)
Hampden-Sydney College	(2011) (2015)
Kalamazoo College	(2007-2017) (2018-2023)
Lawrence University	(2010-2020) (2017-2022)
Luther College	(2000-2006) (2018-2023)
Randolph College	(2012-2016) (2019-2024)
Wabash College	(2008-2013) (2014-present)
Whitman College	(2011) (2017-2022)

The aim of the analysis was to examine how the OIs presented in the missions, values, visions, and goals (strategic plans) of the 11 colleges have changed or remained stable over time.

Moreover, the colleges' maneuver between external expectations and internal needs for change was investigated. Finally, the analysis of these plans was to show whether the sampled colleges still reflected distinctive identities. The analysis process is explained in more detail in the following section.

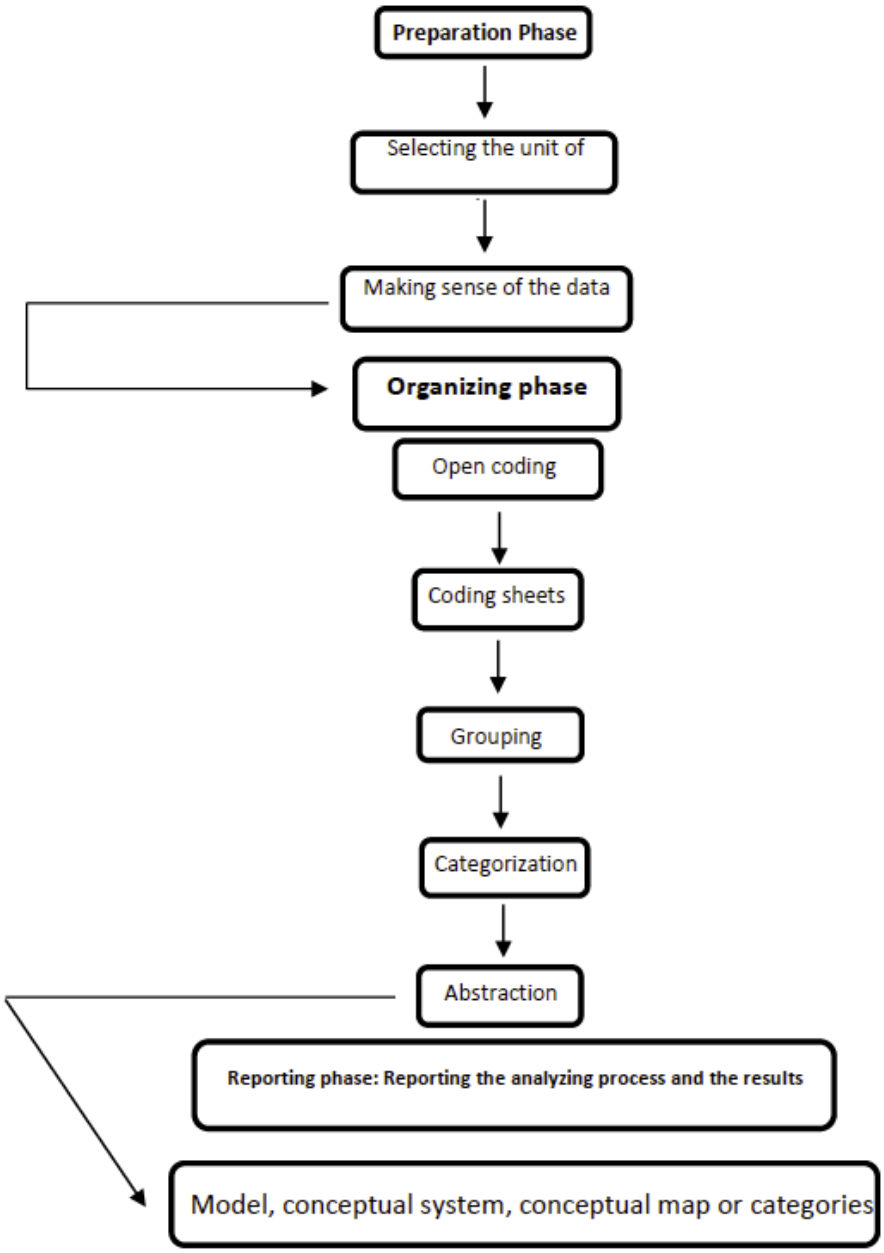
Data Analysis

The analysis of the strategic plans was done in an inductive procedure in which themes and categories were derived from the data (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). This means I moved from the specific codes derived from the texts to the formulation of larger categories. The reason behind choosing this approach was that it allowed me to be directed by the information in the data and to be restricted by preconceived categories (Grbich, 2013). Although Breneman's (1990) definition provides main themes of what the LAC identity is, and the two versions of institutional theory provide themes about the sources and consequences of OI change, the initial analysis was developed without any attempt to look for those themes or match them. This was because I did not want to assign predetermined meanings to the texts and did not want to miss the possibility of new themes that emerge from the data (Elo & Kyngas, 2008).

In regard to the steps I followed to analyze the collected data, I used the three-phase procedure of inductive content analysis as described by Elo and Kyngas (2008). However, after finishing the second phase, each research question then required a unique and different additional analysis steps. Elo and Kyngas (2008) state that inductive content analysis can be conducted by following three phases: the preparation phase, the organizing phase and the reporting phase (See Figure 2). They explain that these phases are considered as a general guide for inductive content analysis. However, this analysis process usually does not proceed in a linear fashion.

Figure 2

Inductive Content Analysis Procedure



Note: Adapted from Elo & Kyngas (2008).

In the preparation phase, I started by selecting the unit of analysis. For this research, the unit of analysis was each sentence in the four sections, mission, vision, values and goals, of the strategic plans of the selected colleges and in the other parts of the plans. Graneheim and

Lundman (2004) state that the most suitable unit of analysis is the one that is large enough to be kept in mind as a context for meaning unit during the analysis process. Depending on the research questions, since the change to be analyzed was organizational (OI change), then taking each sentence in each college's strategic plan as a unit of analysis was more suitable for this study. At this phase, a decision about whether the analysis is for the manifest data or the latent content should be made. The manifest content analysis focuses on the general surface content of the text. The researcher describes what the text actually say and stays very close to it by using the words themselves and describing the visible content of the text (Bengtsson, 2016). In contrast, latent analysis is extended to an interpretive level in which the researcher seeks to find the underlying meaning of the text; what the text is talking about (Bengtsson, 2016). Since the aim of this research was to interpret change in private LACs through the analysis of their OIs, this required not being restricted by the manifest meanings and digging deeper in order to infer the latent meanings behind the words in the strategic plans. The aim of the preparation phase is also to become more familiar with the data (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). This was done by reading the strategic plans several times before analyzing them in order to make sense of what was being communicated in these texts. The aim of these readings was for me to become immersed in the data and familiar with its content (Elo & Kyngas, 2008).

In the second phase, I started organizing the strategic plans of each college, starting with the older plan then the newer one. For each one, I first did open coding for the mission, values, vision and goals. In this step, I read each of those parts of the strategic plan and wrote notes and headings on the margins (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). The same plan was read again and more headings were added to describe all aspects of the content. Next, those headings were collected from the margins on to coding sheets to generate categories. When I finished this open coding

process, the list of categories were grouped under higher order headings. This was done in order to reduce the number of categories by collapsing those that were similar or dissimilar into broader higher order categories (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). When creating categories, I made sure that I was not relying on only bringing the meanings that were similar or related together; I also compared data belonging to one category to data that did not belong to this category. The creation of these categories helped me to have a means for describing the OI of each college as presented in its old and new strategic plans. This of course could lead to more understanding of change in this identity and assisted me generating knowledge about OI change and/or stability.

After finishing these steps, I started the abstraction step, which required formulating a general description of the research topic through generating categories (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). At this stage, I examined each category and gave it a name using content-characteristics words (e.g. academics, teaching, resources). Then, subcategories with similar content and meanings were grouped together as main categories. This process continued until I reached reasonable meaningful main categories. For example, critical thinking, developing minds, service, and responsibility were subcategories that could formulate two generic categories: intellectual formation and civic engagement goals of liberal education; these two generic categories could then be grouped under one main category called "purpose of education."

Since each research question was different and required a different analysis procedure, after finishing this phase, I went back to each question and approach the themes developed in this phase differently to be able to answer that question. For the first question, the focus was on illuminating how the OI of each college has changed or remained stable over time. Thus, the themes generated from the four dimensions of the older plans were compared to the themes generated from the analysis of the four dimensions of the newer strategic plan of the college.

Moreover, part of answering this question was to examine whether the colleges were diverging from the other traditional OI of LACs (size, residential life and undergraduate education). In order to answer this part of the question, the presence of themes related to these criteria was also identified with the intent to provide insights into potential shifts in the OI in light of institutional theory. Although all of the colleges could meet the standards of Breneman's (1990) definition of a LAC, this comparison was to provide more precise description of the presence and strength of these standards in the OIs of these colleges. The aim was to examine how the colleges presented their liberal education as part of their identities over time. In addition to that, it was also important to see if the colleges continued to include the other Breneman's elements in their OIs and whether these elements were emphasized or de-emphasized in their plans.

For the second question, the focus was on finding out how strategic plans (representing the OI) reflected internal needs and external expectations when discussing changes in their education. To be able to answer this question, two main categories were created for each college; one was named "internal" and the other was "external." I then checked all the themes in the categories derived from the second phase and tried to locate any theme that was related to the internal culture of the college (e.g., history of the college, mission). On the other hand, themes that were related to external stakeholders or demands (e.g., job market, students, parents) were located under the external category. This was done for both the old strategic plan and the new one.

For the last question, in order to show and uncover elements related to distinctiveness in strategic plans across the selected colleges, I split the data into groups in order to compare them. Colleges were compared with each other based on their admission selectivity and their different levels of focus on professional/liberal arts education. The aim was to examine whether the

differences between these colleges in terms of these two elements (selectivity and curriculum focus) were reflected in their identities. For distinctiveness based on student population (women/men, HBCU) and their religious affiliation, I checked the emerged themes, derived from phase two, in order to identify the ones related to the colleges' religious affiliation and to their specific student populations. A comparison was made between the occurrence of those themes in the two plans of each college to identify if distinctiveness associated with the religious mission of the colleges or with focusing on specific student populations continued to appear as part of its OI.

The last phase of the analysis procedure was reporting the findings, which is presented in the following chapter. Once I finished analyzing the collected data and identifying the major themes, I used those themes to develop a concept map that could guide me in reporting the findings (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). In preparing the report, I paid attention to describe the analysis process and the findings in sufficient details (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). This detailed description was necessary to provide the readers with a clear understanding of how the analysis was conducted with all its strengths and limitations (Shenton, 2004). In the report, I merged the themes of each of the four dimensions, missions, values, vision and goals, from all the 11 colleges into a set of themes appropriate to each of the research questions and in accordance with existing research on OI and change in higher education. The analysis of the strategic plans was done first by hand and then by using NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software. This text-analysis software is usually used in qualitative research, especially when there is a large amount of data (Grbich, 2013) because it makes the analysis more manageable and adds thorough levels to the analysis.

Trustworthiness

During the previously described content analysis process, I took some steps to enhance

the trustworthiness of my research, including the credibility, reliability, and transferability of the study. First, the collected data was read and examined several times to make sure that I was intimately familiar with the content to be analyzed (Braun & Clarke, 2006). One way of pursuing credibility is to seek agreement among independent coders (Grenheim & Lundane, 2004). In this study, 15% of strategic plans (two colleges: Bennett and Kalamazoo) were chosen randomly at the beginning of the analysis process and were coded by me and another trained coder, resulting in two initial tests of intercoder reliability at the start of analysis (Thayer, Evans, McBride, Queen, & Spyridakis, 2007). The second coder and I worked independently to identify the codes and categories of the missions, visions, values, and goals for each of the two colleges. We then met to discuss the results and see how much the results varied. The validity of the analysis process was met by reaching the minimum level of agreement 85% (Thayer et al., 2007). This step was important to make sure that the inferences that I drew from the results of the analysis were based on reliable and valid data.

During the analysis process, I was also continuously checking the results to see if the analysis of the data and the forming of categories reflect the subject of my study in a reliable manner. I was trying to make sure that the categories formed really cover the data thoroughly. The strategic plans included some parts other than the education of the colleges and their traditional characteristics (e.g., policies of human resources, environment sustainability). I was careful not to unintentionally or even systematically exclude data during this process of cutting down the statements that do not belong to the focus and purpose of this study. I also included numerous representative excerpts and examples from each part of the strategic plans of several colleges so the readers would be able to judge the credibility of the coding and categories I reached.

In order to facilitate transferability, I gave a clear and detailed description of the context of each college, its characteristics, how I selected the sample, data collection sources, and the analysis procedure (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). As I was coding, I kept going back to the verbatim data of the plans again and again to ascertain the description of the colleges' identities (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). This helped me to stay in tune with each college's identity as I was continually studying the collected data about this college. I also developed a detailed audit trial in which I provided a description of the codes and themes I derive from my analysis. Thick descriptions of the contexts in which words and phrases appeared were provided to assure transferability of the collected data. The research steps taken from the start of the research to the development and reporting of the findings were transparently described in detail.

Limitations

This study focused on one type of HEIs, which was the small private not-for-profit LACs. The findings may not be generalized to all higher education institutions. This is because private not-for-profit LACs possess certain features, as discussed earlier, that make them different from other types of HEIs. Although they share the same highly institutionalized organizational field with other HEIs, they face different pressures and challenges due to the conflict between their traditional missions and contemporary needs of higher education. Another limitation of this study was that some types of institutions which were identified as private LACs, according to Carnegie Classification (2018), were not included in the sample of the study. This was because either they did not have two strategic plans of different periods, during the time I searched for data, or they did not meet Breneman's (1990) criteria of what a LAC is. For example, Hope College was classified as "Baccalaureate College: Arts & Science Focus" by Carnegie Classification (2018), but its student population was 3150, which made it not meeting the

standard of small size as identified by Breneman (not more than 2500). Moreover, the strategic plans of this study were collected in early Fall 2020. Therefore, I provide only an analysis of the OIs of the selected LACs based on the documents I found at that time. These identities could be different at other points in times.

Positionality

As a researcher, I find myself interested in studying change in HEOs, and what it takes to navigate effectively through this process. Connecting change to OI has made this topic more interesting to me. I believe in the important role of those intangible aspects in both human and organizational lives. Though this is the first time for me to study OI, I have previously worked on research about organizational culture, closely related aspect to OI, and its relationship to organizational change in HEOs. My work experience as a lecturer and administrator at a HEO, outside the U.S., has made me aware of the complexity of any change process, its challenges, and the impacts and conflicts of multiple constituencies in this process. In regard to private LACs, this is not the first time for me to conduct a study about this type of institution. I previously examined the marketing of different educational purposes on the website of a private HBCU LAC. That study has made me more interested in conducting more research about this segment of higher education. However, I had no experience of studying or working at any private LAC.

I do believe in the traditional educational philosophy of private LACs, which aims at developing the student as a whole. I also do value the emphasis on the high quality of education provided at those colleges and the focus on small numbers of students. In regard to the conflict of adopting professional programs at these institutions, I believe that the main goal of education, in general, is enlightening people's minds and help them to make better decisions in all different

aspects of their lives. Part of becoming a better person should be becoming a productive citizen in the society and seeking opportunities to develop the personal life economically, intellectually, socially, and spiritually. This philosophy of education is part of my identity as a Muslim. Islam places a high value on education of all kinds and developing the human intellect is part of a Muslim's responsibility. Thus, I do agree with the view of education in LACs that aims at developing a sense of social responsibility, besides the individual one, and strong intellectual and practical skills.

However, I also believe that there should always be a constant development and creativity in the content and delivery techniques of higher education. This is part of our responsibility, as human beings, to excel in all aspects of life. Change and transformation, driven by the aim of development, betterment and more efficiency, are always required in all aspects of life, including our education. However, there are certain values and beliefs that need to remain stable in order for higher education to have its role as a means of developing individuals and societies. High quality teaching and learning, integrity, and justice are some of these values. Thus, in my point of view, the problem is not whether LACs should add a new change in its identity; the question is what is the goal behind this change.

If the change in OI is to enhance the main valuable purpose of education, with its high quality, offered by these institutions, I think it is a positive developmental step. I believe that higher education can serve multiple purposes and different goals at the individual level and the societal level. I also strongly believe that restricting these different important goals of higher education to one goal, like social mobility (Labaree, 1997), will make the other valuable benefits and outcomes of higher education neglected and not taken advantage of. For me, motives and

intentions are what make OI change a positive or a negative step in the life of organizations, including HEOs.

Expressing those personal interest, beliefs and values before starting the data collection and analysis helped me in acknowledging and controlling any bias throughout the research process in order to maintain adequate researcher independence required for research integrity. Therefore, to account for and control my subjectivity in analyzing and interpreting the texts, I maintained the attitude of reflexivity, checking subjectivity, and monitoring myself throughout the study. As Peshkin (1988) states that researchers should systematically check their subjectivity while their study is actively in progress. The trustworthiness strategies I have discussed earlier could also help limiting the role and impact of any bias that may occur during the analysis.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

In this chapter, I present the findings of the three questions of this research. The questions are the following: 1) How have the organizational identities (OIs) that private not-for-profit liberal arts colleges (LACs) presented in their strategic plans changed or remained stable over time? 2) How are the internal and external interests of those colleges reflected in their OIs? 3) What are the distinctive features of the OIs of the colleges in the sample? For the first question, findings indicated that the liberal arts curriculum persisted; however, it was cast as means to an end rather than an end in itself and its meaning has been reinterpreted. A relative shift was also revealed in the emphasis of two of the other traditional characteristics of LACs, their small size and their focus on undergraduate education. As for the second question, internal and external pressures shaped organizational identity at both points in time, but in the more recent strategic plans more emphasis was placed on the external demands of the environment. In regard to the third question, findings demonstrated that while some colleges that served particular student populations emphasized their distinctiveness at both points in time, other markers of distinctiveness such as religion or selective admissions became less pronounced over time. Overall, findings indicated that the colleges have maintained their traditional values; however, they have changed the ways in which they operationalize these values.

Before reporting the findings, I need to highlight that I anthropomorphize the colleges when referring to their strategic plans. This is because the strategic plans were the products of the efforts from the organizational members across the college, including administrators, faculty, staff and students. Thus, instead of mentioning those members every time I refer to the plans, I use the name of the college to refer to them.

I present the findings organized by research questions. This due to the fact that each research question was different and required a different analysis, as mentioned in chapter three, of the themes emerged from the four dimensions: missions, values, vision and goals. Themes appropriate to each research question were used to reach the following findings.

Research Question 1

One of the contradiction between the old and new institutionalism is their focus on change and stability. The first question of this research: How have the organizational identities (OIs) that private not-for-profit liberal arts colleges (LACs) presented in their strategic plans changed or remained stable over time? focused on understanding this contradiction. The aim of this question was to examine how have the colleges communicated stability and/or change of their liberal arts curriculum in their OIs over time. The answer of this question was based on comparing the themes generated from the analysis of the missions, values, visions and goals in old strategic plans with the ones in the new plans. As discussed earlier in chapter three, although the main purpose of this study was to interpret change in the education provided at LACs, the other main criteria that define LACs (Breneman's criteria: size, undergraduate, and residential life) were also examined with the intent to provide insights into potential shifts in the OI. The findings of the presence of these criteria in the two plans is also reported under this question.

As summarized in Table 3, the findings of this question revealed that the communicated OIs of the colleges demonstrated stability in: identifying their education as "liberal arts," in connecting this education with the traditional purposes of the intellectual, citizenship, leadership and life developments of students, in presenting it as value commitment, and in characterizing it as a high quality education.

Table 3

Change and Stability in OIs (Liberal Arts in Old and New Plans)

OI Dimensions	Old Plans	New Plans
Liberal Arts and Missions	Liberal arts for: • Citizenship development (e.g., for engaged lives of citizenship) • Intellectual development (e.g., develop capacities to analyze, interpret, criticize). • Leadership development (e.g., lead effectively). • Life Development (e.g., to live humanely)	Liberal arts for: • Citizenship development (e.g., contribute to society). • Intellectual development (e.g., think critically). • Leadership development (e.g., provide enlightened leadership). • Life development (e.g., live honorably).
Liberal Arts and Values	• Commitment (e.g., a strong commitment to… liberal arts education). • High quality (excellence, academic rigor) (e.g., devoted to excellence) • Specific values (e.g., student-faculty relationship).	• Commitment (e.g., we reaffirm our commitment to the liberal arts). • High quality (Excellence, academic rigor) (e.g., rigorous liberal arts education). • Specific values (e.g., lifelong learning).
Liberal Arts and Visions & Goals	• Strengthen liberal arts through innovations (e.g., innovative academic and co-curricular programs) (e.g., strengthen Agnes Scott's identity as a national liberal arts). • Innovation in liberal arts (e.g., technology and interdisciplinary learning	• Liberal arts a means for main purpose of preparing students for career and graduate studies (e.g., prepares its students for post-graduate success). • Reinterpretations of liberal arts (e.g., re-imagines a liberal arts education for the 21st century).

The table demonstrates that stability was presented in both the missions and values of the colleges. On the other hand, changes were also reflected in two aspects of this education. First, liberal arts education has changed from being an end to a means serving a new purpose (preparation for career and graduate studies). Second, liberal arts has become a dynamic overarching principle that can always be reinterpreted. These changes were revealed in the changed visions and goals the colleges expressed for their education as they have developed over time (Table 3). Both tradition and innovation were parts of the education the colleges tended to

represent in their communicated OIs. Thus, the resulted OIs could provide both a sense of consistency with the tradition and past of those colleges and a change in what that tradition would mean today and its ability to serve emerging contemporary needs. In the following sections, I first present aspects of stability in the OIs of the colleges based on their education. This is followed by reporting the findings demonstrating change in this identity.

Stability in Organizational Identity

Liberal Arts for Traditional Missions

Although the colleges in the sample have added professional programs to their curriculum, their communicated OIs in their both plans still represented their education as liberal arts education that serve their traditional missions. All the colleges used "liberal arts" as their general identification of their curriculum. The authors of Whitman' old strategic plan, for example, articulated this quality of their college's identity by describing its education as a "liberal arts and sciences undergraduate education." They maintained this identification in their new plans by assuring their dedication to providing a "liberal arts education." Agnes Scott also opened its old plan with a definition of its curriculum as "A liberal curriculum fully abreast of the best institutions of this country." and kept the same statement in its new plan. Luther, in its both plans, identified itself by its education when it introduced itself as "a liberal arts college." Consistency was also reflected in connecting a liberal arts education with the traditional purposes of LACs articulated in the colleges' missions. Those purposes were mainly represented in four prevalent themes of students' developments: citizenship, intellectual formation, leadership, and life. Citizenship was the most common one; all colleges included preparing students for service or developing responsible citizens as a purpose of their education in both plans. They used different phrases such as "a rewarding life of service", "act responsibly", "for engaged lives of

citizenship" or simply "for engagement." Dickinson, for example, stated in its old plan that its mission was "to prepare young people, by means of a useful education in liberal arts and sciences, for engaged lives of citizenship." This purpose of its education was reassured in its new plan as preparing it students for "service." Preparing students to become engaged citizens is reflecting an image of the tradition of these LACs in promoting democratic equality and responsible citizens.

Intellectual development was the second common theme of the educational purposes articulated by the colleges in both plans. Nine colleges included this form of development in their stated missions, which were maintained the same in both plans. However, the colleges used different terms to refer to these skills. Wabash, for example, identified one of its purposes as to educate "men to think critically." Part of Agnes Scott's mission, which remained the same in both plans, was stated as "Agnes Scott College educates women to think deeply." Whitman was more elaborative and stated that it would help its students to "develop capacities to analyze, interpret, criticize." It reemphasized this in its more recent identity document by stating that "Whitman students develop their intellectual and creative capacities." Bennett also listed those skills, repeating the same statement in its both documents, when it claimed that its students "will learn to use sophisticated intellectual skills, think analytically and solve problems." Other colleges referred to the intellectual skills in more general terms. Kalamazoo was one of those colleges; its aim was to "prepare its graduates to understand better." Augustana described its education as the one "that develops qualities of mind*"* and Luther claimed to provide an education "that disciplines minds." In highlighting this aim of their education and maintained it as part of their identities over time, the colleges indicated stability on one of the main goals of traditional LACs, which is nurturing the intellectual growth of their students (Baker at al., 2012).

The third aspect of development remained connected to the liberal education offered by the sampled colleges was leadership. Five colleges mentioned leadership development as part of their educational purposes in both plans. Bennett's old mission, for example, introduced one of the purposes of liberal arts as a "preparation for leadership roles". It continued this assertion in its new mission and presenting liberal arts education as a preparation for its students to "lead with purpose, integrity, and a strong sense of self-worth." Kalamazoo communicated that its education was for providing its students with "enlightened leadership." The same statement was repeated when presenting its identity in the new plan. Wabash also repeated the same goal statement of producing students who would "lead effectively," stated in its old plan, in its new identity document.

By combining two or more of these aspects in their missions, the colleges also highlighted their traditional concept of student "whole development." (Weerts & Taylor, 2017). Luther expressed this explicitly when it stated that its aim was to "develop whole persons.", in its former plan and continued this emphasis in its later plan, "a comprehensive student experience that develops whole persons." Augustana listed the aspects of holistic development as to "Develop qualities of mind, spirit and body." Five other colleges included the development of students' lives in general as an outcome of their liberal arts curriculum. Wabash, for example, described its education as helping students to "live humanely," and Agnes Scott rephrased it as to "live honorably." Both colleges maintained the same statements in their more recent plans. Whitman classified its programs as ones that "encourage personal and social development" in its old document and as the one that promote "ethical and meaningful lives of purpose" in its new mission. Leadership and students' life development are also considered main aspects of a typical LAC, which colleges chose to continue emphasizing and connecting their liberal education to.

Continuing identifying their education as "liberal arts" and connecting it with those traditional purposes of LACs reflect the colleges' attempts to embody stability in their OIs as they were presenting themselves to their stakeholders (Hatch & Schultz, 2002). This stability could help the colleges express their OIs with a kind of coherence with their past and their tradition. However, in both plans, most colleges tended not to focus on specifying or identifying what their liberal arts curriculum specifically meant. The presentation of this education was not focusing on what was being taught, but rather on the outcomes of this education (Haberberger, 2018). The colleges did not mention the traditional majors of liberal arts curriculum in their identification; their main focus was on listing the skills and the approach of their education. Whitman was the only college in the sample that specified the majors of liberal arts in its old plan, "Through the study of humanities, arts, and social and natural sciences." This broad identification allowed the colleges to reveal stability yet demonstrate readiness to embrace change and adaptation in the articulation of their OI. This reflects an approach to OI as a continuing accomplishment rather than a fixed concept (Hatch & Schultz, 2002; Golant, Sillince, Harvey & Maclean, 2015).

Value Commitment and High Quality

The liberal arts curriculum also continued to be associated with value commitments in the discourse of the OIs over time. Besides identifying their education as liberal arts and connecting it to their conventional missions, most colleges in the sample articulated their belief in this education and placed value on it. The liberal arts curriculum was associated frequently with the theme of commitment, value, roots and/or foundation. For example, Dickinson, in its old plan, related its current liberal arts education to the beliefs of its founders who "recognized that the success of the American experiment would depend on the power of liberal education." In its new

plan, it acknowledged that it remains convinced of the value of its "liberal arts education." The first main value of Wabash's both plans was its "liberal arts education. Other colleges elaborated more and expressed their commitment to some of the characteristics of this education, like focusing on teaching and learning, lifelong learning, or maintaining student-faculty relationships. For example, the belief in the close relationship between faculty and students was highlighted by Bennett, Luther and Wabash in both plans. Luther, for example, highlighted that its "students, faculty, and staff are enlivened and transformed by encounters with one another." In its new plan, it reminded its stakeholders that "the depth and quality of faculty-student engagement" was one of its essential qualities. Life-long learning was also stressed by Whitman and Dickinson in both documents.

The value commitment associated with the liberal arts education could help the colleges to tackle different goals for different audiences. It helps to represent them to their external stakeholders as accountable and responsible social actors and impress them with loyalty to their tradition (Hatch & Schultz, 2002; Whetten, 2006). It also functions as an underlying structure of meaning for the internal participants of these colleges (Golant et al., 2015). Placing value on this distinctive traditional education, thus, could sustain the internal and external legitimacy of those colleges and their leaders, who are supposed to be the representatives of the values communicated in the OIs, at the top of which is their liberal arts education (Golant et al., 2015).

Another aspect of stability in presenting the curriculum of the sampled colleges was reflected in describing its high quality. As the colleges communicated their identities, they commonly made claims about the quality of their education. The colleges used terms like "excellent" and "rigorous" to describe the quality of their education. In the old plans, claims of curricular excellence appeared in several colleges. Augustana, for example, listed "academic

excellence" as one of its main values. Kalamazoo also valued its environment, described as "A learning-focused environment that integrates academic excellence, experiential education, and outstanding co-curricular experience. One of the characteristics that Randolph assured it would maintain in its liberal arts education, albeit its intention to implement changes in it, was its "excellence." Lawrence University also declared in its mission that "The university is devoted to excellence.". Moreover, one of its beliefs was to sustain its distinguished curriculum, which it described as having "excellence in a rich variety of major programs." Whitman asserted being "committed to an excellent well-rounded … education." Besides sating it as one of its main values, excellence was also a quality used by Bennett to describe the products of its education; its graduates who "will be as known for their excellence." Wabash also highlighted this quality in teaching, as part of its curriculum, when it assured its commitment to "scholars who pursue teaching excellence as their highest priority." The term "rigorous" was another expression used by some colleges to assure their belief in academic excellence. Whitman described its learning and education as "an ideal setting for rigorous learning and scholarship." Hampden-Sydney described its current curriculum and the curriculum of its future as a "rigorous liberal arts education." Wabash agreed with the two colleges and listed one of its values as "A rigorous liberal arts education." Bennett also expressed its belief in being "committed to the Bennett ideal of providing young women a rigorous education in liberal arts." The use of those different terms all indicated the quality of their education was crucial in identifying their identities.

In the new plans, the colleges remained fairly stable in emphasizing the excellence of their curriculum. Some colleges, (e.g., Bennett, Wabash, Hampden-Sydney) simply restated the same statements they used in their first plans about the excellence of their programs. Other colleges paraphrased those statements to continue delivering the same message about the quality

of their curriculum. Luther, for example, which used "robust education" to describe its curriculum in its old plans, preferred the term "excellence" in its new plan. It opened its new plan by describing itself as "Rooted in a theological and educational tradition committed to excellence." It also stated that "academic excellence across our programs" was one of its essential qualities. Kalamazoo continued what it started in its old plan by stating, "Kalamazoo College values academic rigor and all components of a liberal arts education."

The use of terms like "excellence" and/or "rigor" to refer to their education could help the colleges to convey both a positive attractive image and sustain their legitimacy. As Taylor and Morphew (2010) explain, the term "excellence", for example, is indefinable and non-controversial; it does not have any negative or specific restrictive meanings associated with it. At the same time, it is an attractive term usually connected with positive images. Thus, when curriculum is attached to it by using phrases like "academic excellence" or "curricular excellence", it provided content to the term ''excellence." The result will be a positive image in which prospective students and other stakeholders might imagine the benefits of an education earned at these colleges without adding restrictive or definite implications. Also, the belief in high quality education (i.e., excellent or rigorous) is considered a central characteristic of private LACs (Hoskins & Brown, 2017). By associating these normative terms with the curriculum, the colleges are placing legitimacy upon this curriculum. Thus, they could both express part of their distinctive identity as LACs and create an attractive image for their external stakeholders (Hatch & Schultz, 2002).

Although the comparison of the emerged themes of the missions and values of the colleges revealed stability, not all dimensions of the colleges' OIs were so stable in regard to their liberal education. I discuss two ways in which liberal arts education was represented

differently over time. First, liberal arts education had changed from being an end to a means serving a new purpose (preparation for career and graduate studies). Second, liberal arts education had become a dynamic overarching principle that could always be reinterpreted. Findings related to these two changes is discussed in the following sections.

Change in Organizational Identity

Liberal Arts: Means, Not an End

The comparison of the colleges' visions and goals in their old plans with those in the new ones indicated that liberal arts education has shifted from being an over-riding objective to a means for achieving a new higher priority or purpose, preparing students for career and graduate studies. Analysis of the colleges' visions and goals in their old documents resulted in a main theme in regard to their curriculum: an aspiration of maintaining and strengthening this liberal arts curriculum. Liberal arts education in those old plans was presented as their main goal, the end, of the colleges.

Innovation was another common theme of the colleges' old visions and goals. Ten colleges in the sample used the word "innovation" in their communicated OIs as they were communicating their future identities (visions). However, this innovation was to serve the colleges' main priority, which was expressed as maintaining the strengths of their liberal arts education and enhancing it with new developments that could respond to evolving needs. Wabash, for example, in its old document, described its commitment to its traditional liberal arts foundations before articulating an aspiration to "reaffirm and strengthen these foundations of the College." Agnes Scott, after declaring its commitment to its "founding vision of empowering women by providing a liberal education" in its old vision, announced its intentions to "enhance" its curriculum by "a distinctive education that links the liberal arts to vibrant opportunities."

Lawrence was more specific and envisioned itself as balancing tradition and innovation by maintaining "the strength of these programs (academic, residential and co-curricular) while proposing new initiatives." In these examples, which were articulated by the colleges in their old texts, liberal arts education was the goal and aspirations were presented as maintaining and serving this goal.

The innovations the colleges were seeking in their old plans were sometimes described generally. Randolph communicated its future education as "innovative academic and co-curricular programs." Luther sought to provide its students with a "transformative learning experience." Other colleges elaborated on these innovations. Augustana, for example, boasted of offerings "emphasizing problem-based learning, discovery methods in science instruction, collaborative research and experiential learning through, for instance, service learning and international travel opportunities." Dickinson mentioned technology, interdisciplinary learning, and study abroad. Agnes Scott aspired to engage "a wider world" by adding new global ideas to its curriculum. Kalamazoo included experiential learning and multiple experiences of global learning too as main innovations.

Comparing the above old visions and goals to the new ones revealed that the new identities (i.e., new plans) assertively cast sampled colleges as organizations that prepare students for lives after graduation (including career and graduate studies preparation). Liberal arts education was no longer cast as an end in itself, but was presented as serving this purpose. This change was well illustrated in the colleges' new visions which explicitly prioritized preparation for career and graduate studies. Augustana, for example, declared its main vision "as a residential liberal arts and sciences college located in the Quad Cities that fully prepares its students for post graduate success." Another example was Randolph, which introduced itself as

"A Randolph education provides the student with a liberal arts foundation that promotes a meaningful life while equipping the graduate to pursue a rewarding career." Luther made a similar claim, vowing that its education "will teach students how to integrate their values and goals into lives and careers." Lawrence also envisioned its liberal arts education as preparing its graduates for "for lives of work and service." Kalamazoo did not shy away from declaring that it is "distinctly positioned to prepare students for work and life." Wabash also decided to "Establish career development as an integral part of the student's four-year experience at the College." This shift in the focus of the new visions and priorities of the colleges reveal the impact of the image stakeholders hold about an organization in promoting the organization to implement a change in its expressed identity to create a better image (Hatch & Schultz, 2002).

Career preparation did not receive this level of attention in the old plans. It was communicated as one of the additional services the colleges were considering to provide to their students. Whitman, for example, did not mention this goal in its entire old document. Wabash mentioned it once as the last in order initiative needed to enhance students' skills. Only four colleges (Augustana, Hampden-Sydney, Bennett and Randolph) considered it as main priority that even came next to their main priority of fulfilling the traditional role of their liberal education. The prioritization of career development in the new visions of the colleges made liberal arts education function as a means that can serve this priority. Maintaining their liberal arts identity in their curriculum but presenting it as a means to an end could help the colleges to frame new strategic priorities while underscoring the central distinctive value of this traditional quality of their OIs. By doing so, the colleges could conform to this distinctive feature of their OIs while increasing the possibility of innovative organizational responsiveness associated with it (Golant et al., 2015).

Liberal Arts: Dynamic Overarching Principle

The second change that occurred in the new OIs of the colleges was that their liberal arts education had become conceived as an overarching principle which could progressively be defined. Instead of presenting liberal arts education as a historical tradition that had to be literally followed; documents emphasized a dynamic flexible education to which new meanings and practices could be added. This was evident in stressing two themes: the dynamism of their liberal arts education and its potential to be reinterpreted.

Where the OIs referenced change in the colleges' education, this concept was associated with the terms like "reimagine" or "reinvent" to represent the possibilities of creating a new image of this traditional education. For example, Agnes Scott, stated in its new vision that it "re-imagines a liberal arts education for the 21st century." Kalamazoo, which expressed high pride in its historical liberal arts education presented in the "K-Plan," in its old plan, articulated its aim of "reimagining K-Plan" in its new plan. Luther also aimed to "Reinvent the curriculum to inspire and prepare students to solve grand challenges." Augustana determined to "reimagine the relationship between academic and co- and extra-curricular activities." Similarly, Lawrence decided to "reimagine how students might purposefully integrate co-curricular activities,… and curricular work."

Moreover, terms related to the flexibility and dynamism of their education also supported the colleges' attempts to present their liberal arts curriculum as something that could always be adapted and transformed to respond to new needs. For example, Whitman described its "dynamic flexible curriculum" before introducing all the transformations that had been implemented in it. Agnes Scott portrayed its future curriculum as "a high-quality, dynamic, relevant and interdisciplinary liberal arts curriculum."

This flexibility in "reinterpreting" what liberal arts education meant allowed the colleges to introduce new modifications to the core requirements of their education and place them under the umbrella of "liberal arts education." Dickinson, for example, decided to include technological and information fluency as part of its curriculum and considered these proficiencies as essential part of a liberal arts education. After introducing this innovation in its new plan, it justified the change by stating that "Liberal-arts skills and values are precisely those that enable people to understand and steer the rapidly developing world of information over-abundance." For Agnes Scott, liberal arts education has become the one that focused on global learning and leadership development. Some colleges went further and decided to add new academic programs. Hampden-Sydney's board of trustees was considering adding a business major. Randolph was more definite in its goal to "add new academic programs" that could respond to current needs. Bennett was more explicit and listed its new programs' "foci areas" in which it combined tradition with innovation. It listed these areas as "Leadership, civic engagement, global citizenship, innovation/ entrepreneurship, and communications." Such inventions in interdisciplinary learning were fairly common. For example, Wabash's liberal education included interdisciplinary programs in business and digital arts. Augustana decided to "Include vocational discernment and career and professional development in the first-year orientation." These findings indicated that viewing liberal arts education as an overarching principle that could be redefined made this education a resource for change as well as stability.

The above findings of stability and change reflected in the OIs of the colleges as they developed over time indicated that the colleges could highlight entrenched claims of their most central and distinctive features of their identities, their liberal arts curriculum. However, campus officials also actively translated this meaning to provide contemporary relevance. The label

"liberal arts" remained stable while its meanings widened and acquired new implications. By using a rhetoric that linked their past with their present and future, the colleges could express enduring commitment to this entrenched quality of their identities and recontextualize its applicability in the light of current concerns about its value. (Golant et al., 2015).This rhetoric of connecting these particular traditional elements of their education with their new focus could also help the colleges to avoid any disruptive contradictions in their OIs.

Change and Stability in Other LAC Criteria

In this section, I report the findings of the presence of the other three of Breneman's standards of LACs (undergraduate focus, small size, residential) in the communicated OIs of the colleges in both plans (Table 4). The colleges referenced their residential environment all along the two texts. However, the colleges' maintenance of a small size as a main characteristic was rarely mentioned in both OIs. Moreover, their focus on undergraduate education was less apparent in the new plans than the old ones.

According to Breneman (1990), a large percentage of students at a liberal arts college reside on campus. This residential life was presented and emphasized in the identity statements of both plans. This finding supports earlier studies (Taylor & Morphew, 2010) underlining that LACs with more traditional liberal arts fields (like the sampled colleges) tended to highlight being residential as part of their descriptive characteristics. Almost all colleges referenced this quality as part of their general identification of who they are in both plans. Luther, for example, introduced itself as "As a residential College." Kalamazoo described its community as "A learning community that is residential" in its old plan and continued this emphasis in its new plan by stating that one of its values was "residential experiences for students that contribute to their growth." It also appeared among the themes of the values and beliefs of the colleges. Dickinson

showed commitment in "providing a useful education … within a residential setting." Wabash stated its belief in "A few years of residence, a lifetime of loyalty" in its both plans.

Table 4

Breneman's Criteria in Old and New Plans

Breneman's Standards	Old Plans	New Plans
Residential	(# 10 colleges) Augustana Dickinson Hampden-Sydney Kalamazoo Lawrence Luther Randolph Wabash Whitman	(# 10 colleges) Augustana Dickinson Hampden-Sydney Kalamazoo Lawrence Luther Randolph Wabash Whitman
Small Size	(# 2 colleges) Augustana Bennett	(# 2 colleges) Lawrence Whitman
Undergraduate	(# 7 colleges) Augustana Bennett Dickinson Kalamazoo Lawrence Wabash Whitman	(# 4 colleges) Bennett Dickinson Lawrence Wabash

Commitment to this traditional mode of education was not wholly divorced from a changing world. Augustana linked on-campus residence with students' life outcomes. "We achieve our mission by maintaining a strong commitment to small-college, residential, liberal arts education, which enables development of the critical, creative and integrative thinking skills that are demanded by graduate schools and employers" its document stated. Enhancing this residential life and linking it more closely to academic programs were among the goals the colleges planned for as they developed from their old to new plans. Randolph was the only college that expressed its flexibility in regard to this feature in its new plan. It assured remaining

residential but being flexible in welcoming "commuting students."

Being small in size did not appear to be a quality the colleges desired to highlight explicitly as part of their OIs in both plans. This finding is also consistent with existing literature (Taylor & Morphew, 2010). In the old plans, only two of the colleges (Augustana and Bennett) articulated this quality explicitly as a main characteristic of their identification. Bennett described itself in its mission as "a small, private… liberal arts college". As part of its "Promise," Augustana stated that it would achieve its mission "by maintaining a strong commitment to small-college." Both colleges removed this reference to their small size in their new plans. Bennett substituted it with a vision of having "an intimate engaging learning community." However, another two colleges (Lawrence and Whitman) chose to reference their small in size in their new strategic plans. Whitman stated it as part of its beliefs "We believe in the promise of lifelong learning that is central to the kind of small, residential liberal arts education offered at Whitman." Lawrence highlighted this quality as part of its classification when it discussed changes in its goals; it stated, "These modified objectives respond to the changing landscape for small residential liberal arts colleges." Though being small seemed as a quality that most of the colleges in the sample did not adhere to, its positive connotations remained as part of the OIs of these colleges. This was reflected in describing themselves as "community" and in highlighting the close relationship between faculty and students by some of them. Randolph, for example, articulated, "Professors are noted for their accessibility, and the impact of co-curricular opportunities is maximized by the College's size."

Undergraduate education also received less emphasis over time. In the old plans, some colleges explicitly referenced this feature of LACs. Whitman, for example, declared its commitment to "providing an…undergraduate education." Dickinson and Lawrence also

identified their education as “undergraduate” level in their missions. Kalamazoo committed to “offering a remarkable undergraduate experience.” Other colleges preferred to be less explicit and used other terms to refer to this quality. Bennett, for example, described itself as a “four-year” college while Wabash repeatedly described its students as “young men.” However, the more recent statements of the OIs of the sampled colleges indicated a shift in commitment away from undergraduate-focused education. Only Dickinson and Lawrence retained this feature as part of their identifications in their new plan. Wabash and Bennett continued to refer to a focus on undergraduate education implicitly by using the same phrases they used in their old documents.

Not emphasizing the two traditional qualities of being small and focusing on undergraduate degrees might indicate a readiness by some colleges to create some changes that might not align with one or both of these two features. One such change was the adoption of graduate education. For example, Agnes Scott stated its intention to “Establish and grow at least two graduate programs that leverage the college’s strengths.” It also aimed at having “One or more non-degree educational programs” and growing “an undergraduate degree completion program for non-traditional age.” Randolph, in its new text, also decided to have “New masters programs” and to “expand the range of support services for non-traditional student populations.” Dickinson expressed openness to this possibility, in its newer plan, by raising the question “If, as some argue ‘masters is the new baccalaureate,’ should Dickinson consider offering masters degrees in selected departments?” It followed this by stating that this might be “a model for the college in changing times.” Growing enrollment was a second change that could conflict with the traditional characteristics of a LAC. As reported in the following section, increasing enrollment was one of the main goals in the colleges’ old plans and it had become an even higher, if not the

highest, priority in the new documents. Some colleges mentioned the number they wanted to target when stating their enrollment goal; however, they expressed it as a minimum target they sought to hit rather than a quality to be highlighted within their missions or values. Hampden-Sydney, for example, had a goal of enrollment stated as "Each academic year recruit 325 first-year, 19 transfer, and 16 re- enrolled students to maintain a total student body of 1,100." Wabash in its old plan had a goal to maintain enrollment of at least 900 to 925 students" and in its new plan, it stated the goal as "Grow the College's enrollment to 1,000."

The above findings indicated less emphasis on two qualities (small size, undergraduate focus) that are considered as main features of typical LACs. This shift in the articulation of these two main standards of LACs in the OI claims indicate the continuing dynamic process through which this identity was developed (Hatch & Schultz, 2002). The colleges selectively prioritized particular elements of their OI (liberal arts and residential) while other features were purposefully underemphasized or omitted in order to respond to environmental pressures and to make sense of and defuse potentially disruptive contradictions that could result from the changes they planned to implement (Golant et al., 2015).

Research Question 2

The focus of the second question of this study was on finding out how strategic plans (representing the OI) reflect internal needs and external expectations. The question was: How are the internal needs and external demands of the colleges reflected in their OIs? The aim of this question was to investigate themes related to the motives (external demands and internal needs) the colleges expressed as they were communicating change in their curriculum. As illustrated in Table 5, students' expectations and interests were the primary external demands to which the colleges responded. The colleges' missions and history were the main internal demands. The

findings demonstrated that the old OI was balanced by the articulation of arguments supporting compliance with expectations of external stakeholders and commitment toward internal needs of the colleges. In the new plans, more attention was given to external expectations.

Table 5

Internal and External Motives (Old and New OI)

Needs and Demands	Old Plans	New Plans
Internal Needs	• Mission (e.g., "to fulfill the College's core liberal arts mission." • History (e.g., needs to remain true to its heritage)	Mission (e.g., "mission-driven creativity and innovation)
External Demands	Students' Interests and expectations (e.g., new programs of study that are of interest to today's students).	Students' Interests and expectations (e.g., re-evaluate program offerings to fit the changing needs of our student body).

External Demands

When the colleges discussed the change required to strengthen their liberal arts education in their old plans, noted previously, that change was often attributed to the colleges' need to meet the demands of students and their parents. Students' needs and interests appeared to foster the innovations the colleges sought in their liberal arts education. Augustana, for example, connected changes in its curriculum with students' interests; it aimed at "adding additional minors or bridge majors that are (a) of interest to today's students." Randolph also made a connection between the addition of new programs and current students' needs. This was presented in its vision for its future self : "An outstanding academic environment, led by a noted faculty, will support learning in both traditional and new programs of study that are of interest to today's students." Hampden-Sydney also articulated an identity that was trying to impress prospective students by displaying its care for their main current interests. It asserted that it would "strengthen programs that will

enable H-SC graduates to be competitive in the job market. The communicated OIs of the colleges also reflected a need to impress prospective students and become more appealing to them. Agnes Scott, for example, expressed the main goal of its strategic plan as "we seek with this strategic plan to enhance the Agnes Scott experience for future generations of students." Dickinson also explained the need for adding innovations to its liberal arts curriculum, (e.g., interdisciplinary programs) as one of the attempts to satisfy what it described as "the increasingly consumer-oriented parent and student audiences that enjoy wide choices." This focus on the interests and expectations of students and their families is expected since they are considered as the primary resource providers for these tuition-dependent institutions (Baker & Baldwin, 2015).

The external factor of students' demands became more obvious in the colleges' new strategic plans. Responding to students' interests seemed an even greater motive than in the past. Colleges modified their liberal arts education and made it serve career preparation. Kalamazoo, for example, expressed this demand when discussing its decision to "re-evaluate program offerings to fit the changing needs of our student body." While Kalamazoo addressed this need succinctly, Randolph was more explicit in drawing a connection between its changes and its customers' expectations. It explained the reasons behind the changes it implemented in its curriculum by two main reasons, both related to recruitment: "Students who view college as a step toward a particular career may not be responding to the liberal arts argument" and "The curriculum is not outwardly distinctive or appealing to target students." Whitman also tried to introduce a rationale for its initiative "Life After Whitman," which was basically making its liberal arts curriculum more supportive for career preparation. Initially, Whitman summarized changes in its new document as intended to make its education "even more relevant and more vital for the coming generations." Liberal arts was cast a means of career preparation because:

> students change jobs an average of four times in their first decade of full-time work, and are increasingly mobile. Employers are looking for employees who can demonstrate their value on day one, and many new graduates will be working and living in new and unfamiliar settings.

Luther also acknowledged that "the changing needs and expectations of students" were crucial factors in determining the strategic changes it needed to implement in its liberal arts education. Agnes Scott's main motive behind what it considered a new distinctive invention of liberal arts (SUMMIT) was "to make Agnes Scott a more compelling choice for today's students." These assertions of responding to students' interests demonstrated the colleges' need to sustain and enhance their enrollment. This was explicitly expressed by Whitman, which explained the motives behind changes in its liberal arts education as "critical to advancing Whitman's mission of student learning and strengthening the case for choosing a Whitman education in the crowded higher education landscape."

Internal Needs

The OIs of the colleges changed in response to internal as well as external pressures. Two internal elements were highlighted: the colleges' missions and their history. The motives in the old plans clearly reflected a response to these internal factors. Agnes Scott, for example, described its aspiration for changing its educational experience as enhancement of its "core liberal arts mission." Augustana also asserted that the changes in its curriculum were "consistent with the mission of the College." Hampden-Sydney explained the motive behind its new strategies of teaching as "to fulfill the College's core liberal arts mission." In the same vein, other colleges also presented the motive behind the changes as a need to build on their history and legacy. For example, when Kalamazoo introduced its intentions to create changes in its liberal arts education, it presented these changes as building on its history which has always had innovation as an integral part or key element; thus, Kalamazoo justified the change as a need to

hold to its " historical principles of innovation." Another example was Dickinson, which framed that the strategic initiatives in its plan as responding both to external demands and to the "needs to remain true to its heritage." Moreover, besides describing its changes as "congruent" with its mission, the college elaborately connected every aspect of these changes to a historical principle of its founder. By doing so, the college asserted that all the changes it had decided to implement fulfilled one of its historical principles. By associating changes with their mission and history, the colleges presented strategic change as a legitimate trajectory aligned with their OIs (Fumasoli et al., 2015).

In the new plans, however, compliance with external demands appeared to be more prevalent than serving the internal needs of the colleges. This was evidenced not only in the discussion of external factors above, but also in the briefer reference to the role of these factors, compared to their old plans. Some colleges even omitted internal factors when presenting their motives for change. While Dickinson elaborated on the role of its history in stimulating the change of its education in its old document, its historical principles were highlighted in one sentence in its new plan; "always seeking to draw upon our historic sense of purpose." Lawrence dedicated a whole paragraph in its old text to clarify that the change it was planning for was to save its tradition and "balance between tradition and innovation". In its new plan, it combined the external with the internal needs in one general statement that its innovation was to make "the university attractive for those who participate in our educational mission." Kalamazoo's emphasis on the relation of its history to the transformation in its education, emphasized earlier in its old text, was not highlighted; it summarized the role of its mission in one phrase mentioned once in the whole document, "mission-driven creativity and innovation". Other colleges showed less emphasis on the internal elements previously mentioned in their old plans. For example,

Randolph, in its old document, articulated that one of the aims of its strategic initiatives was to "bring form and direction to Randolph College's Mission"; it also restricted the change of adding new programs to what was appropriate to its tradition as liberal arts college. However, in its new plan, the same goal of adding new program was stated without mentioning the restriction set by its tradition. New programs would be guided by new students' interests. Randolph's new plan stated, "The College will explore, and implement as appropriate, new academic programs that will appeal to current and emerging student markets." Hampden-Sydney, in its old plan, connected its changes to its mission and planned to strengthen the mission with some changes. In its new plan, which it introduced as replacing the old one, Hampden-Sydney removed this part totally. Bennett restricted its rationale for change to "promote student success". Luther's old strategic plan highlighted the College's intention to deepen its mission and communicate it. The new plan gave most focus to external challenges.

A few colleges did continue to emphasize internal factors. Agnes Scott explained that its new innovative curriculum was designed "to make Agnes Scott a more compelling choice for today's students. It renews and magnifies the college's core mission, offering a distinctive college experience grounded in the liberal arts." Also, Augustana highlighted that its strategic plan was to "advance the success of our students, our graduates and our mission." This finding aligns with existing literature underscoring the fact that in times of strategic change, illustrated more in colleges' second plans, legitimation and recognition are sought more from external stakeholders, including students and their families (Fumasoli et al., 2015).

The above findings indicated that the OIs of the colleges maneuvered between internal expectations and external demands for changes they planned to implement. Those demands and expectations were pulling and pushing the colleges in different directions. Thus, the OIs of the

colleges, deriving from the two strategic plans, were trying to fit between these internal elements and the new requirements of their external environment. Responding to students needs could save the colleges from the potential loss of legitimacy and revenue if these needs were ignored in relation to their main stakeholders (i.e., students and their families). On the other hand, responding to the internal pressure of remaining true to their missions and tradition could also assure their internal legitimacy. Thus, the OIs, as articulated in both strategic plans, sought to provide both internal and external legitimacy to the aims of the changes in their curriculum (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). The result was an OI that reflected the demands of both internal and external stakeholders (Hatch & Schultz, 2002).

Research Question 3

The last question of this research aimed at discovering whether distinctiveness can still be traced in the identities of the sampled colleges. The question is: what are the distinctive features of the OIs of the colleges in the sample? The selected colleges varied in terms of their religious affiliations, targeted student population, admission selectivity and the level of professional programs in their curriculum. The aim of this question was to investigate whether distinctiveness in the characters of those colleges still existed or they had become less distinctive over time. The findings revealed that most colleges continued to reflect their distinctive features related to their student population and curriculum; however, organizational specificities attributed to their religious identities became less emphasized and their selectivity became less obvious in their new plans. Findings related to aspects of distinctiveness is discussed in the following sections.

Distinctiveness

Four colleges in the sample target specific student populations (Agnes Scott, Bennett, Hampden-Sydney and Wabash) (Table 1 chapter three). This distinctive quality of their profiles

was explicitly articulated in both plans. A consistent narrative articulated commitment to their organizational distinctiveness in terms of focusing on specific student populations. This was indicated in their missions, their values and in their future visions. Agnes Scott, for example, communicated its focus on women's education clearly in its mission, which remained the same in both plans, "Agnes Scott College educates women to think deeply." This distinctiveness was also conveyed in its strategic initiatives; one of them was developing programs "of women leadership that address their challenges and opportunities." Moreover, one of the goals of the college was to "promote women's success in fields and forms of inquiry in which they are traditionally underrepresented."

Bennett was a women's college that was also an HBCU. Again, this quality was revealed in the old plan, which expressed pride in this identity more than once. For example, its president stated, "we have sought to distinguish ourselves as one of the only two historically black women's college in the United States." Bennett also endeavored to prepare its graduates "possessing a greater appreciation of the history and culture of African and African Diaspora, the struggles and accomplishments of women." The College also linked these values to graduates' outcomes; "women of color are 14.5% of the workforce and African-American women account for 30% of all female headed families in the U.S. It is important for Bennett College to substantially affect their quality of life of future African families." However, Bennett made a meaningful shift in its new plan and targeted "women of color" rather than "African American women" in its mission. Though the College widened the scope of its mission, it maintained its pride in its identity as an HBCU college. This was reflected in maintaining the section of its history and continuing identifying itself with its original identity, "Bennett is the only historically African-American college for women in the state of North Carolina and is one of two in the

country." The College also repeated the same statements used in its old plan of instilling the appreciation of African American culture in its students. With the challenge of decrease in its enrollment expressed in its previous plan, this widening of its scope has become a main priority for Bennett.

Both men's colleges also highlighted their distinctive focus on a specific student population. They reflected distinctively their commitment to men's education in both documents. The focus on men was mentioned in their mission, values, vision and goals. For, example, Wabash restricted its mission to men; "Wabash College educates men." Hampden-Sydney aspired to "become a model liberal arts college recognized for excellence in educating men for the twenty-first century." It also had a goal to establish partnerships with other men's colleges. Wabash had a goal to "lead dialogue on the challenges and opportunities of educating young men." Continuing serving as men's colleges seemed to have more advantages for these two colleges than following the paths of some single-sex peers which decided to become co-educational.

Relative distinctiveness of the colleges' OIs was also reflected in regard to their curriculum focus on professional programs. The Carnegie Classifications listed five colleges with arts and sciences focus (Dickinson, Kalamazoo, Lawrence, Wabash and Whitman), five with arts and sciences plus professions (Agnes Scott, Bennett, Hampden-Sydney, Luther, and Randolph), and one (Augustana) with balanced arts and sciences/professions. The findings indicated that claims to the liberal arts education were common across all three categories. This confirms findings in the existing literature that colleges with a professional emphasis do not recoil from claiming the cover of liberal education in statements revealing their identities (Delucchi, 1997). However, the arts and sciences and the arts and science plus professions were

presenting themselves as exclusively liberal arts in orientation while the college with balanced arts and sciences/professions (Augustana) revealed its distinctiveness by explicitly affirming its focus on both traditional liberal arts and professional degrees. It distinguished itself by stating, "Unlike many liberal arts colleges, Augustana is committed to both the traditional liberal arts curriculum and a preprofessional curriculum."

This similarity and difference continued to occur in the new plans. Augustana became more explicit in reinforcing its identity as a LAC focused on preparing students for careers; it even decided to place career preparation and post-graduate planning "as essential parts of fulfilling its mission". Augusta further redefined the "whole person development" as a "holistic student development including academic, co-curricular, social, and career goal achievement." Though colleges in the other two categories retained their focus on liberal arts orientation, they showed readiness to offer new programs. Eight of these ten colleges planned for creating new programs to serve students' current needs. Dickinson gave examples of these programs in its intention to "develop new programs [that] address emerging contemporary issues by offering broad certificates in health studies, security studies and dance". Hampden-Sydney was considering adding a business major to its curriculum. Others, like Kalamazoo, Randolph and Luther, did not define the programs that would be added. Whitman was the only college that explicitly removed any doubt of adding professional programs to it curriculum when declaring, "this plan does not add professional programs." Continuing to emphasize their exclusive focus on liberal arts and not on the professional programs, and/or their distinctive tradition of offering single sex education, could allow these colleges to differentiate themselves from other LACs.

Less Distinctiveness

The sampled colleges demonstrated a move toward more similarity in regard to their

religious affiliations and selectivity. Four colleges in the sample had religious affiliations that imparted some distinctiveness to their OIs. In their old plans, three of these colleges identified themselves as related to specific churches when communicating their missions. Bennett introduced itself as "a United Methodist Church-affiliated institution." Augustana started its plan with a self-expression combining both its liberal arts identity and its religious identity. "Augustana College, rooted in the liberal arts and sciences and Lutheran expression of the Christian faith," the document began. Luther also indicated its religious identity, stating, "As a college of the church, Luther is rooted in an understanding of grace and freedom." Agnes Scott was the only religiously affiliated college that did not identify itself as college of a church in its mission. In the "about Us" page on its website, Agnes Scott both declared its affiliation and acknowledged that its board of trustees is an independent one. This explains why the College did not identify itself as a religious college.

The religious identities of the four colleges were also reflected in the role of "spiritual development" and moral values in student development. Agnes Scott, for example, articulated its intention to "develop the spirit, to cultivate lives of integrity, purpose and consequence." Bennett assured the promotion of "morally grounded maturation, intellectual honesty" in its students, then related these commitments to its religious identity. It also included integrity and justice as part of its organizational beliefs. Augustana too encouraged the spiritual development of its students and the belief in integrity in its campus. For Luther, truth, faith, and "care for all God's people" were main values of the College. Colleges also drew a connection between preparing students for service and moral values. "We envision Luther as a college where students continue to be transformed by the demanding journey of liberal learning, by the call to think about learning in relation to faith and service," one document read. Religious identities were also

reflected in colleges' programs. Augustana, for example, emphasized its intention to "maintain a strong campus ministries program." These values and goals reflect how the identities of this group of colleges were different from the other colleges in the sample. Colleges showed intentions of continuing serving as religious colleges and not straying away from their distinctive missions.

However, the presentation of religious identities in the new plans was not as strong and distinctive as it had been in the old plans. Two colleges kept their affiliations of their churches in their missions (Augustana and Luther). Bennett removed its religious affiliation from its mission, instead placing it in the section on the College's "History." Augustana decided to open wider doors and added the word "inclusive Lutheran higher education" to its mission instead of "Lutheran expression of the Christian faith"; also there was no mention of spiritual development in this mission. Moreover, the College did not reflect its religious identity in its future vision or goals. Luther kept its religious affiliation in its mission and retained the aim of spiritual development. However, it showed more flexibility and signs of openness. This was revealed in its statement "as a college in the Lutheran tradition (ELCA) marks us as a community that is both rooted and open. Neither sectarian nor secular." Agnes Scott removed any indication of its religious identity, even promoting spiritual development, from its new plan. This finding revealed the conflict religious academic organizations face between holding firm to their religious identities or becoming secular in order to enhance their reputation and image (Mixon, Lyon & Beaty, 2004). Though the colleges did not abandon their religious identities, the distinctiveness of these identities were less pronounced in their new documents.

Sampled colleges also varied in their levels of admission selectivity (Table 1). Five colleges (Dickinson, Kalamazoo, Lawrence, Wabash and Whitman) were considered highly

selective, two colleges (Bennett and Randolph) were more inclusive, and four colleges (Agnes Scott, Augustana, Hampden-Sydney and Luther) were somewhere in the middle. The distinction between these three categories in regard to their selectivity was evident in the old plans but became less obvious in the new ones. In the old documents, when articulating their future priorities in regard to enrollment, three of the highly selective colleges described the students they were aiming to attract with terms related to "selectivity." For example, Wabash expressed its aim to "attract, support retain and prepare qualified young men." Whitman affirmed its commitment to "ensure enrollment, retention, and graduation of an academically talented" students. Dickenson was more explicit and restricted its enrollment to "student body with excellent academic credentials a diversity of talents, high academic motivation." By contrast, Kalamazoo and Lawrence did not reference their selectivity in their old plans. Also, all the less selective colleges (Agnes Scott, Augustana, Hampden-Sydney and Luther) included the condition of "being qualified" when presenting their future enrollment goals. Augustana, for example, had a goal to "recruit and retain the high-achieving student." Hampden-Sydney also expressed the goal of access to its education for "all qualified students." Agnes Scott used the term "talented" once to describe the students it sought; its goal was "to attract students from across the socio-economic spectrum, making an Agnes Scott education more affordable for talented students of limited financial means." The two inclusive colleges (Bennett and Randolph) also aspired to improve the quality of their recruitment pool by seeking more qualified students in their old plans. Bennett had a goal of benefitting its recruitment efforts "by attracting more and better qualified students." Similarly, Randolph sought to "target students who appreciate the value of a Randolph College education, who are academically well-qualified."

Interestingly, this consensus of highlighting their selectivity in the old plans has become

an agreement to ignore this feature in the new ones. Among the highly selective colleges Wabash and Lawrence said nothing in regard to the academic qualities of the students they were seeking. For Kalamazoo, it was sufficient to describe the importance of matching its infrastructure to the qualities of its people. “Kalamazoo College’s campus has present-day needs that must be addressed to ensure the quality of its facilities matches that of its exceptional students, faculty and staff.” Whitman also did not emphasize admission requirements. Such a reference was made only obliquely, when the College expressed its intentions to become more affordable. Whitman would “continue to offer merit-based aid to students across the socioeconomic spectrum to increase affordability for all families and encourage the strongest students to attend Whitman.” Dickinson was the only college that retained its focus on academically excellent students. “Dickinson seeks students whose abilities, attitudes and attributes match the college’s vision. Our students must be academically able, intellectually curious,” according to Dickinson’s new plan.

Similarly, all less selective colleges except Augustana did not mention admission for only qualified students. There was no use of the word “qualified” or any other word that referred to selectivity or admission requirements. Augustana was the only institution in this group that mentioned selectivity, and it only did so in the context of becoming more affordable. Augustana officials sought to make their College accessible “to an academically qualified student body drawn from across the nation and the world.” Obviously, the challenge of not having sufficient recruitment pools made both inclusive colleges remove the reference to seeking academically qualified students from their new plans. Randolph was explicit in articulating its challenge in enrollment. It explained that “New student recruitment is low and on a downward trend. The pool of graduating high school students will be decreasing, and its makeup will change.” This

urged Bennett to add access as a new value to its mission in its new plan. This reduced distinctiveness among the sampled colleges in regard to their reference to selectivity as part of their OIs aligns with the survival strategies employed by other LACs in their adaptations of their enrollment and selectivity (Tarrant et al., 2018). These findings confirm that changes in enrollment strategies were among the modifications embedded in the internal culture of the colleges because of the impact of the external surrounding environment (Hatch & Schultz, 2002).

Summary

The findings of the current research were presented through a comprehensive overview of themes across all the sampled LACs. The themes were presented in the context of each of the three research questions. Findings indicated that the liberal arts education persisted over time. However, this education was cast as means to an end rather than an end in itself and its meaning was reinterpreted to serve new purposes. Internal and external pressures shaped the organizational identities of the colleges at both points in time. However, in the new documents more emphasis was placed on the external environment. The findings also demonstrated that while some colleges that served particular student populations emphasized their distinctiveness at both points in time, other markers of distinctiveness such as religion or selective admissions became less pronounced over time.

Those findings indicated that both change and stability were reflected in the development of the OIs of the sampled colleges. Traditional values and labels were maintained; however, new purposes and dynamic reinterpretations were attached to them. The colleges' traditions were both preserved and modified. The findings also revealed that the need to respond to environmental pressures facing this segment of HEOs was increasing. Change has become a constant need for these colleges. However, the influence of internal factors was taking place in creating legitimate

responsiveness and adaptations. Moreover, with the changes created in their identities, the colleges did not demonstrate a total similarity of their developed OIs. However, they approached their distinctive features with some readiness for adaptation and a tendency to selectively prioritize particular elements of their OI while underemphasizing others. This resulted in colleges developing more complex OIs rather than radically changing them or totally sustaining their features.

These findings have several implications for LACs, and HEOs in general. The colleges need to be careful as they are reinterpreting the meanings and purposes of their traditional education and emphasizing its dynamic flexible nature. Ambiguity in the new created meanings will have serious negative impacts on both their internal culture and their external image and legitimacy. Identifying the central character of their identities (core purpose) is necessary to avoid this risk and to direct colleges' leaders in their decisions in regard to change and stability. Moreover, the influence of internal factors needs to be restored in LACs if these colleges aspire to develop strong OIs. In addition, being an organization of a distinctive mission does not have to be conceived as creating or maintaining a rigid entity. Incorporating the distinctiveness of this organization with the necessary organization change can help this organization not to be isolated.

The findings also indicate that interpreting change in the OIs of the sampled colleges required an integration of elements from both the old and new institutionalism. Both normative and intraorganizational elements were taking place in the change and the stability of the OIs as they have developed over time. This calls for a more comprehensive approach to studying change in HEOs. More discussions and implications of these findings is presented in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the contradictory explanations of organizational change in HEOs as provided by the two versions of institutional theory. The research was conducted with the aim to understand curriculum change in private not-for-profit LACs by analyzing their OIs as communicated in their strategic plans over time. It was designed to explore whether OI could reconcile the contradictory views of change in this segment of HEOs. Three questions were formed to fulfill this research purpose: 1) How have the organizational identities (OIs) that private not-for-profit liberal arts colleges (LACs) presented in their strategic plans changed or remained stable over time? 2) How are the internal and external interests of those colleges reflected in their OIs? 3) What are the distinctive features in the OIs of those colleges?

To answer these questions, I studied the OIs of eleven private LACs via a qualitative content analysis of two of their strategic plans (old and new). The focus was on private LACs that added professional programs to their curriculum; however, these colleges could still be identified as LACs based on Breneman's definition. This chapter presents a discussion of major findings as related to the literature of: change in private LACs, institutional theory explanations of change, and the concept and dynamics of OI. This is followed by a discussion of the implications of these findings in theory and practice, recommendations for future research, and a conclusion.

Core Purpose of LACs

Research Question 1 looked at whether the OIs of private LACs changed or remained stable overtime. Generally, findings indicated that the colleges changed the ways in which they operationalized their values, meaning that both change and continuity were reflected in their OIs.

It is clear that the LACs in this study, like many other higher education institutions, were substantially influenced by the changing social environment. Enrollment hardships appeared as a main challenge for these colleges. Decreasing enrollment and the increasingly competitive market have had a negative financial impact on many LACs since tuition is usually considered as a significant source of their institutional revenues (Baker & Baldwin, 2015; Hu, 2017; Taylor & Weerts, 2017).

The current study's findings supplemented existing literature by demonstrating the peculiarities of these organizations' responses to their challenges. Enrollment hardship is a common challenge among American colleges and universities. Due to their distinctive histories and missions, however, private LACs responded to these pressures in distinctive ways. Indeed, enrollment challenges and a college's distinctiveness were at times linked to one another. The unique traditional liberal arts education and core values of those colleges appeared to be important factors contributing to declining student interest in these colleges. Thus, the colleges faced a profound challenge: their primary resource providers, tuition-paying students, expressed discontent with their main features, liberal education and its curricular expressions.

This has led the colleges to face the tensions between tradition and enrollment. This tension was revealed in the way the sampled LACs communicated their OIs in relation to their institutional environment. In their new strategic plans, the colleges maintained their claims of providing liberal arts education. However, they changed the language articulating the purpose, forms and practices of the liberal arts. In other words, the traditional concept of liberal arts education was both preserved and modified. By doing so, the OIs of the colleges could connote both a sense of stability and a sense of change and flexibility.

On the one hand, the colleges' identities continued to acknowledge and complied with

their inherited liberal arts curriculum as a core curriculum distinguished by its high quality and associated with the stated traditional missions of developing the intellectual skills of students and preparing them to be good citizens and leaders. They also continued to make it appear as a constraint on the range of the possible strategic choices that could be implemented by expressing value commitment to it. These findings demonstrate a support for the classic institutionalism's claim that organizations' distinct traditions and values are believed to continue over time (Clark, 1972) and that changes should proceed according to those cultural beliefs and values (Leslie et al., 2012; Stensaker, 2004).

On the other hand, the findings revealed that the OIs of the colleges adapted to the normative image prevailing in the field as a whole (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). This was reflected in the latest strategic plans in which the colleges took into consideration their need to have a new vision for liberal education. New plans tended to cast liberal arts education as the means for serving a new main purpose, preparing students for career and/or graduate studies. As a result of this modification in their purpose, their liberal arts education needed to be reinterpreted and redefined with new practices and forms.

The colleges inserted their commitment to liberal arts education within a new purpose and a dynamic reinterpretation. This change opened opportunities for adaptations that could make the colleges more appealing and, thus, enhance student recruitment. In the new OIs, with the recurring emphasis of the commitment to liberal arts as their organizational competence rather than their organizational objective, the colleges could introduce a different set of objectives based on adaptive responses to normative practices. In other words, the colleges introduced liberal arts education as the distinguished aspect of their organizations but not as its structuring principle that used to direct their practices. Liberal education was not presented as a

goal in its own right. Instead of presenting their commitment to liberal arts as justified for its own sake, this education has become a means through which they can server new purposes, which can allow them to compete effectively with other colleges and universities.

Thus, colleges could pursue these new objectives while still maintaining an integral part of the heritage of their OIs. This differentiation between ends and means is considered a powerful resource for the management of both stability and change in OIs (Golant et al., 2015). Thus, the traditional liberal arts curriculum did not function as a core determining objective creating a reason for rejecting the implementation of a new purpose (i.e., career development). It was translated into a method for implementing new purposes.

This reconciliation of different interpretations of the curriculum could open the door for a broader meaning of ”liberal arts education.” Accordingly, the colleges, in their more recent plans, represented their liberal arts education as a concept that could be redefined or reinterpreted. By doing so, they rejected the established literal definitions of liberal arts education in favor of openness for emergent understanding based on the changing contexts in which this education was applied. Thus, stability was revealed in maintaining the term “liberal arts education” while change was revealed in its practices, forms and purposes. This reflects the argument of some scholars who argue that liberal arts education inherently has the ability to change in response to new demands (Shoenberg, 2009; Spellman, 2009).

This reimagining of liberal arts promoted the additions of new adaptations and developments in the new plans. Examples included experiential learning, undergraduate research, global education, new interdisciplinary programs, technology-based learning, and the addition of new majors and minors. These initiatives were cast not as a departure but as a continuing articulation of a traditional mission that remained constantly open for “discovery” in

light of the changing environments surrounding the colleges (Ravasi & Philips, 2011). New plans thus both responded to changing norms in the field of higher education (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991) and to LACs' distinctive heritage (Selznick, 1957). Changes in the liberal arts curriculum were legitimized, presented as steps along a continuous line of development.

This intention to reinterpret and "reimagine" what liberal education means is consistent with findings of OI research, which indicate that the dynamics of OI involve a reuse of existing labels and their redefinition in order to ensure the consistent relevance to the historical and traditional values and beliefs (Gioia et al, 2013; Stensaker, 2015). This is one of the explanations of how change and stability can both occur in the OIs of institutions. Institutions tend to keep the same traditional labels; however, they add new meanings to them (Gioia et al., 2013; Stensaker, 2015). Research focused on strategic plans also show that designers of those plans tend to make a careful distinction between values and the concrete activities related to those values. While values remain stable, activities are continuously redefined, thus attaching new meanings to agreed-upon values (Fumasoli et al., 2015).

The tension between enrollment imperatives and the liberal arts mission paradox also presented in the colleges' attitude towards some elements of their traditional educational structure. Old and new strategic plans de-emphasized the colleges' small size and their focus on undergraduate education. Most of the colleges neither described themselves as being small nor quantified their student numbers. However, most of them noted some of the positive aspects of small colleges, a technique that seemed to increase the appeal of private LACs to their prospective customers and key audiences (Hoskins & Brown, 2017). Some colleges articulated a curricular shift from their traditional focus on undergraduate education by adding graduate programs and/or admitting non-traditional age students. This is in line with some findings from

prior research (Hartley, 2017). Other colleges of the sample chose to remain silent about this feature (Taylor & Morphew, 2010).

The above interpretations reveal that, at the surface level, organizational stability and organizational change can coexist in the communicated OI of institutions. The changes the colleges adopted, in terms of the addition of a new purpose for their curriculum and in reinventing its practices and forms, were not radical changes disowning and diverging from the basic values on which the OIs of the colleges were founded. The colleges changed their liberal arts education by broadening and widening its scope. Thus, the OIs of the colleges could reconcile claims of consistency with their past with claims of adaptive flexibility in the present. In this way, they could balance the idealism carried in sticking to the identity inherited from the past with the pragmatic opportunities associated with responding to the demands of the present (Selznick, 1957).

While it is clear how these dimensions of organizational identity *could* fit together, how they *will* fit together is less certain. Organizational identity is in some sense aspirational. As such, the important question here is whether this reinterpretation of "liberal arts" can help those colleges overcome their enrollment challenge without a negative impact on their distinctive identity. In order for this change to be effective, LACs need first to determine what is the central part of their identity, the essence of the college as an organization. Although both change and stability constitute OI, there is a central element of any identity that basically defines what the organization is in the first place (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Gioia et al., 2013). This centrality is the first pillar in the traditional definition of OI provided by Albert and Whetten (1985), which scholars have almost a consensus of its necessity for the existence of any identity (Gioia et al., 2013). It is this criterion of central character that usually serves as guidance for direction and

decision making regarding change and stability in OI. Identifying such a core purpose is a very challenging process; it is more of an art than a science. Hartley and Schall (2005) suggest some general steps that can guide HE leaders in establishing this purpose. They explain that effective leaders need to first draw from a small group of different members of the college's community and listen to the cacophony of their understandings of the purpose of their colleges and work with them to derive from these various meanings a harmonious theme. The shared understanding of the real purpose of the college among a large enough and influential enough members of the college will enhance the process of establishing this purpose. This group of members, who should be committed and believe in this core ideology, can then draw others to the cause and, thus, increase the number of those who will support this purpose in decision- making processes. Leaders should not expect a universal consensus among all members of the organization (Hartley & Schall, 2005).

To be clear, in highlighting the need for identifying the central character of the college, I am not referring to the official missions stated in strategic plans and colleges' websites. Research has indicated that sometimes these missions consist of stock collections of vague and aspirational phrases and fail to convey any meaningful sense of an institution's unique identity (Delucchi 1997; Taylor & Morphew, 2010). Rather, I am referring to a clear sense of purpose that can answer the existential question of "why are we here?" as an organization (Hartley & Schall, 2005). This answer would serve as a kind of broad framework within which members of the college can organize their activities and be able to answer the question "what should we be doing?" in regard to change and stability. Such a principle would help them to discern which behaviors are more valued and which can be ignored (Schein, 1992). Moreover, a central purpose can also give individuals at those colleges a sense of meaning about their work and

promote a sense of the organization's distinctiveness and purpose (Clark 1972; Selznick 1957). A central purpose also can explain how the work contributes to a larger cause, which in turn can generate greater commitment on the part of students and employees (Hartley & Schall, 2005). Thus, officials and decision makers at LACs need first to determine the core purposes of their organizations. That purpose could be commitment to liberal arts education and its traditional setting. Alternately, that purpose could be advancing society and elevating the human condition. In regard to special focus colleges, HBCU colleges or women colleges, for example, the purpose could be reclaiming their history and providing education committed to social justice. Or they could focus on enhancing the social mobility of these groups of individuals in the society.

Whatever the purpose may be, identifying a central organizational commitment could help to guide college leaders as they seek to navigate changing circumstances. By contrast, the absence of such central purpose would lead the colleges to be torn between various calls to change and stability. Some argue that LACs can witness enrollment growth by merely staying authentic to their historical educational approach (Kimball, 2014); others believe that values and principles of these colleges should change over time (Gumport, 2000; Hartley & Schall, 2005). Maintaining general values and changing how they are operationalized can help to navigate this tension. However, if the values and operationalization are not connected to the college's core purpose, the organization will not have an identity to guide future adaptations. Having failed to find the distinguishing value of liberal education in contemporary society in what was taught, the colleges shifted to focus on new forms and practices added to it (how it is taught). However, the colleges need to be careful of the risk of ending up with ambiguous meaning of their education: rigorous academic experience or preparing the well-rounded student for a job? This ambiguity of their education and their purposes might have negative impact on these colleges (Haberberger,

2018). The colleges may end up not fitting in with the categorization of LACs or any other categorization.

Ready to Change

The second research question examined another contradiction between the two versions of institutional theory. The two theories interpreted organizational change differently. On one side, the new institutional theory argues that organizations change in response to the external demands in an effort to increase their legitimacy (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Delucchi, 1996; Morphew, 2002). On the other hand, the classic version of this theory stresses the role of internal factors of organizations in stimulating and directing change (Selznick, 1957; Kraatz & Zajac, 1996). In general, the findings revealed that the old strategic plans tended to emphasize internal factors. The eleven colleges tended, sometimes at great length, to connect change initiatives with their missions and/or histories. However, the internal needs received less emphasis in the new plans, which tended to emphasize external factors such as student demand.

When communicating OIs, organizational members usually face the challenge of navigating the tensions between external constituencies and internal interests (Stensaker, 2015). The analysis of the texts revealed that such tensions were bridged by the OIs of the examined colleges. Changes were explained as responding both to internal (e.g., by enhancing their missions and building on their history) and external (e.g., by creating a better image for their external stakeholders) demands. One of the most daunting challenges facing independent colleges and those who value them is to expand cultural understanding regarding their worth, including among current and prospective students and their parents, especially in regard to the outcome of their education in getting a job (Wells et al., 2017). Thus, the colleges tried to implement changes that responded to this need. These findings indicated that traces of the

stakeholders' own images have leaked into the organizational identities of the colleges (Hatch & Schultz, 2002). The colleges were trying to adapt to the external normative prescriptions for the purposes of their education to succeed in delivering on the external expectations directed at them. In other words, the image current students and their families have about higher education serving mainly personal aspiration and economic benefits has become part of the communicated IOs of these LACs. This image could leak to the identity through two factors: access and exposure. Hatch and Schultz (2002) explain the impact of access by stating that organizations' usual attempts to draw their external stakeholders into a closer relationship with them allow access. This access of those participants not only expand the boundaries of the organizations but also changes their organizational self-definitions as the stakeholders' interests and views become part of the organizations' activities and decisions. This was reflected in the claims some colleges made that their plans (identities) were a product of a participation from several external stakeholders, in addition to the internal ones. Moreover, in a world of increased exposure to critical voices, many organizations find creating and maintaining their identities problematic (Albert & Whetten, 1985). An implication of increased access to colleges is that their organizational life (values and norms) is now more open and available for scrutiny to anyone interested in them (Hatch & Schultz, 2002). Also, increased exposure means that members of the colleges hear more opinions and judgments about their organization from stakeholders which create more pressures for change on them (Hatch & Schultz, 2002).

However, in order to face the challenging paradox of becoming flexible or staying focused on their mission, the colleges' identities tried to assert a need for this change as an obligation to reflect a more authentic expression of their missions and historical values (Golant et al., 2015). In their old plans, the colleges attempted to articulate that the changes they planned

were needed to strengthen their missions and build on their history. This emphasis on internal factors lessened over time. The new plans placed far more emphasis on the external environment. The diminished emphasis on internal factors in the new plans can be explained by the growing intensity of external change pressures facing those colleges. Compared to the old ones, the new plans were framed within a context of increasing external pressures for greater external rationalization. This was presented in the introductions of the second strategic plans of some colleges. Dickinson, for example, addressed this need by stating that "When one adds a slip in the demographics of high school students in key recruitment pools for our college and its regional peers, we face a potentially severe weakening of demand for a Dickinson education." Luther also introduced its intentions by the fact that "the challenges to enrollment and fiscal sustainability posed by the changing needs and expectations of students: the number of prospective college students of traditional age is declining in the Upper Midwest." Thus, in the new plans, conformity to the standards and practices of the organizational field was a key driver of the colleges' behavior (DiMaggio and Powell1983, 1991). This made external factors more prevalent than commitment to their history and missions in the new plans (Gioia et al., 2013; Fumasoli et al., 2015).

Heightened emphasis on external demands and waning attention to internal might continue to characterize colleges' response to the changing landscape of higher education. Enrollment challenges facing these vulnerable tuition-dependent institutions will likely to increase in the coming decades with the spread of online education, the higher costs of education and the increase in racially underrepresented students not typically targeted by these colleges. (Morphew & Braxton, 2017). The internal core of liberal arts colleges is often seen as competing with demands for change and adaptations that come from external forces such as the economy,

technology, and students and their parents (Morphew, 2009). Ever-greater emphasis on responding to problems and demands in the surrounding environmental threatens the organization's distinctiveness and redefines it as playing a merely technical and instrumental role (Golant et at., 2015).

College leadership can play a significant role in strengthening the role of internal factors in decision-making by stimulating, resisting and directing change in OI (Stensaker, 2004). A reflection of this role was revealed in the analysis of the plans of some colleges. Before introducing the transformations they announced, they related these changes to the college's leadership. For example, Lawrence, explained changes it created in its new plan compared to its old one as due to the change in its leadership. Bennett also elucidated its intentions to revisit its institutional mission and priorities in order to ascertain their alignment with its new president's vision for the future. Whitman attributed the launch of its new strategic plan to the arrival of a new president. This role of the colleges' leadership in directing the change process could give more support to the old institutionalism view of change (Selznick, 1957) so long as college leaders choose to respond to internal factors as well as external demands.

Distinctive Missions

The third question addressed the debate of whether LACs are becoming more similar as a result of their adoption of the same practices and structures over time. The narratives revealed relative commitment to organizational distinctiveness in regard to colleges' targeted student population and curricular focus. In regard to curriculum focus, the colleges of arts and sciences focus and arts and sciences plus professions clearly articulated liberal arts claims in their communicated OIs in both plans. This is intuitive since these colleges, according to the Carnegie Classification (2018), were identified as awarding the highest percentage of their degrees in the

liberal arts fields. Moreover, the college of balanced arts and sciences/professions also expressed its distinctiveness in its communicated OI; Augustana assured its focus on both traditional liberal arts and professional degrees. This indicates that the college with more professional programs did reveal this aspect in its communicated organizational identity. Also, the colleges with more focus on liberal arts did not highlight the addition of professional programs as part of their identities.

Other markers of distinctiveness also remained in prominence over time. The colleges that targeted specific student population (men/women, HBCU) tended to extol enduring commitment to this entrenched feature of their OIs. Admittedly, some liberal arts colleges that used to be single-sex colleges had become coeducational in an attempt to increase their enrollment. Some claim that the declining number of women's colleges, for example, would make the ones that retain this quality more distinctive and therefore more attractive to their stakeholders (Jaschick, 2017). Men and women colleges in the sample seemed to conform to this argument. They chose to maintain and highlight their distinctive feature of being a single-sex LAC. Though Bennett widened the scope of its mission by targeting "women of color", the College continued expressing commitment to its identity as an HBCU college.

By contrast, distinctiveness based on religious affiliation became less emphasized and more inclusive in the newer communicated identities. This might be explained by the dilemma religious HEOs face of whether they should maintain their distinctive religious identities or gain a stronger academic reputation and increase their enrollment by becoming secular (Mixon, Lyon & Beaty, 2004). Selectivity also received less attention in the new plans than in the older documents. Most of the colleges ceased to mention this criterion as they moved from their old plans to the new ones. Lessened emphasis on this distinctive quality could be explained by the

need of those colleges to increase their enrollment rather than restricting it to those students who were highly qualified and likely to be from wealthy families (Gansemer-Topf, Zhang, Beatty, & Paja, 2014). Commitment to a high level of selectivity appeared to be abandoned because it could be seen as a potential barrier to enrollment increase. This reveals the on-going reconciliation between contrasting logics when making OI claims (Golant et al., 2015).

As a group, LACs include a number of mission-driven organizations that provide liberal arts education to specific student populations (men's/women's colleges, HBCUs, and religiously affiliated institutions). Remaining faithful to these distinctive historical missions under resource pressures has proven difficult. College officials need to decide if these distinctive features are still a crucial part of the OI of their colleges or they merely function as tools to distinguish their organization from other LACs and other HEOs in general. In other words, campus leaders need to make sure that their image as a religious college, women's/men's colleges or an HBCU match their values, activities and practices (Stensaker, 2015). If these historical missions are still integral to the definition of who they are, then they should maintain and emphasize them as part of their identities. Colleges need to be careful of including such distinctive feature as only a symbolic element in official statements while not fulfilling them with activities and behaviors. This would lead to what is called a gap between an image and an identity (Stensaker, 2015). One way of overcoming the difficulty of being restricted to serving a specific population during the enrollment pressures is to maintain those missions and commitments while opening the door for enrolling other populations. For example, some argue that religious colleges can open their doors to students from other faiths while still affirming their own faith commitment (Taylor & Weerts, 2017). By doing so, colleges are also helping in reflecting and advocating for the diverse American society in which they exist.

The above interpretations and discussions reveal that exclusivity, a feature that LACs used to highlight as part of their OIs (see chapter two), has become a barrier for some of these colleges. One of the reason to choose LACs as a topic for this study was that distinctiveness can be reflected in the OIs of these colleges. LACs have long been distinguished from other HEOs by their exclusivity, whether in being religiously affiliated, women's colleges, HBCUs, and/or highly selective. Many colleges espoused two or more of these characteristics. However, the environmental challenges these colleges have been facing have forced those colleges to deemphasize their distinctiveness. This was reflected in how some colleges in the sample tried to avoid highlighting their exclusivity, as in the case of Bennett College, an HBCU that targeted students from other racial backgrounds in its new document. Moreover, most of the colleges emphasized access and affordability as main features of their new identities. This indicates that these LACs might be going through what is called a "transitional identity" or "interim identity" (Garcia, 2017) as they are moving from their exclusivity. The presence of students from different racial backgrounds (presented in Table 1) at these colleges indicate the inclination of those colleges to compromise their exclusivity.

With the increase in the diversity in the U.S. society and the challenge of enrollment decrease LACs face, some campus officials have found it necessary to move away from their exclusivity and distinctiveness. As Garcia (2017) argues, HEOs need to respond to the demographics of U.S. society (e.g., increase in Latinx students) by implementing necessary modifications in the elements of their culture and services. These transformations would make the change in the OI of these institutions responsive to their environments in mission-focused ways, not merely in ways designed to increase enrollment (Garcia, 2017).

Implications for Theory

The above discussion of the research findings and the contradictory explanations of change in LACs, presented in chapter two, reveal that a combination between elements from both versions of institutional theory can be considered as a more plausible way for understanding change in this segment of HE. Although the sampled colleges created changes in response to the normative assumptions (as stated in the new institutional theory) of what higher education should look like, this change was not independent from the colleges' structural constraints. Those constraints included the colleges' traditional liberal education, the distinctive missions of some of the colleges, and the established identity labels of their main values. Constraints are usually associated with the classic version of the institutional theory (Selznick, 1957). This indicates that both the normative elements and the intraorganizational ones were interacting when implementing changes in those colleges.

Moreover, findings also showed that the external environment determined the organizational standards that could legitimate change in the OIs of the colleges. According to the new institutionalism, seeking external legitimacy is considered as the main motive behind acquiring new normative behaviors and standards in the field (DiMaggio & Powell, 1996). However, based on the findings of this research, legitimacy can be considered as an element that connects both versions of the theory (Stensaker, 2004). This legitimacy was not totally external. The change occurred in the OIs of the colleges indicated that leaders of those colleges seemed to rely on both internal legitimacy and the external one. In their attempts to create a more externally legitimate image of their colleges, leaders used their traditionally established labels and values of their colleges. Instead of taking the external normative image of what a HEO should offer, this image was translated to fit those established identity values and labels. In other words,

legitimacy was sought through references to familiar cues already existing in the internal cultures of the colleges (Stensaker, 2004).

These findings have implications for understanding change in HEOs. One of these implications is that both the normative and the intraorganizational processes are needed for OI change. The normative process plays a role when these organizations need to fuse or align their norms and behaviors with emerging external demands. On the other hand, the intraorganizational process can be identified when officials of those organizations insist on maintaining the main values and the distinctiveness of their organizations. The literature of change in higher education, presented in chapter two, has been drawing a sharp separation between the two processes of change reflecting their distinct underlying structures, motives and outcomes. However, based on the findings of this study, which is in line with other research (Stensaker, 2004; Stensaker et al., 2019), this sharp separation seems to cause a problem in interpreting change in these institutions. This calls for a more comprehensive theoretical approach to examining and interpreting organizational change. An approach where there is not one but several contradictory variants that constitute the nature of this change, stimulate and direct it, and form its outcomes (Greenwoods & Hinnings, 1996).

Another implication for the theory is what can be called the fruitful distinctiveness or what Oliver (1997) refers to as "normative rationality". This can be described as having a "fidelity" to the organization's distinctive values which not necessarily restrict its adaptation and its acquisition of resources (Stensaker, 2004). Most colleges managed to create innovations though they continued reflecting distinctive OIs. This indicates that a strong and well established OI can be considered as an advantage in the change process and not merely as a disadvantaged rigidity as it is often perceived (Clark, 1972; Selznick, 1996). Some even claim that the lack of

change in OI should not always be considered as a positive feature reflecting a strong organizational identity. Stensaker (2004), for example, found that one of the reasons behind not implementing new policies of teaching and learning in some HEOs was attributed to ineffective leaders who could not solve the problem of the lack of agreement on that necessary change among their organizational members.

Moreover, the different decisions taken by colleges sharing the same distinctive missions (e.g., the two women colleges: Agnes Scott and Bennett) in regard to the scope of change in their OIs also demonstrate the role of power in change vs. stability decisions. The established power structures at those colleges made a decision of how to respond to the challenges and translated them to fit each one's own needs (Baker & Baldwin, 2015; Brint & Karabel, 1991). This was also reflected in the different levels of changes occurred in the religious colleges in regard to their religious identity. While Agnes Scott chose not to highlight this feature in its new identity, Augustana and Luther maintained it but made it more inclusive. The role of power is a main focus in the classis institutional theory. It is this power structure (active agency) that can restore the role of internal factors of HEOs in directing the change. Strengthening this role would help those institutions establish Clark's (1972) "organizational saga" and what he referred to in his statement: "all higher education institutions have roles, but some have missions." (Clark, 1970, p. 234). If institutionalization is about balancing external and internal interests, this balance can be reached by bringing insights from the old version of the theory to the study of change (Selznick, 1996; Stensaker et al., 2019). Greenwoods and Hinnings (1996) summarize this balance and the role of power in creating it when stating that:

> Change and stability are understood through the ways in which organizational group members react to old and new institutionally derived ideas through their already existing commitments and interests and their ability to implement or enforce them by way of their existing power and capability. (Greenwoods & Hinnings, 1996, p. 1048)

Based on the findings of this study, the dichotomy between convergence and divergence in OI change can also be questionable (Stensaker, 2004). The colleges' openness towards adding a new purpose for their liberal arts education and widening its practices and scope did not reduce all their other identity elements and made them similar to each other. The findings indicated that the colleges did not convert to new similar identities but each one developed a more complex OI over time. In this complex OI several elements were sought to be integrated and co-exist in the college (e.g., global liberal arts fostering civic engagement and career development in a religious college). Some argue that this tendency towards complexity would make convergence even more difficult (Stensaker, 2004). This complexity and the co-existence of convergence and divergence requires that research should focus on studying institutionalism as a process not as an outcome (Stensaker, 2004).

Finally, the most critical implication of this study is that OI, as a means to combine insights from the classic and new versions of institutional theory, can offer a fruitful link between the normative and the intraorganizational elements of this theory. It can provide members of the organization with a core set of normative and organizational cultural elements around which they can craft their narratives and sense-making activities (Hatch & Schultz, 2002; Stensaker, 2004). Pressures for conformity and sticking to values and tradition are all likely to act together to give a particular meaning system to the process of change. Tensions and dynamism are expected to appear when normative and intraorganizational elements are combined in the process. At the end of the day, HEOs will continue to face more external forces that will create new norms and standards to which they will find themselves hostages. However, the internal organizational culture can be used by effective and authentic leaders to face those forces and develop these organizations. Thus, it seems more promising to study the interplay of

various institutional elements and drivers than to follow what Stensaker (2004) describes as a "reductionist" approach to change interpretation and implementation.

Implications for Research

This study focused on one type of HEOs, small private not-for-profit LACs. In order to reach a more comprehensive understanding of organizational change in higher education, similar studies could be a conducted with different types of HEOs (e.g., public universities, community colleges, research universities). Such studies would embrace the breadth of the variation that exist in this organizational field and may reveal the commonalities and differences between change and stability in the OIs of different institutional types. Thus, a better and more comprehensive understanding of the contradictions between the two versions of institutional theory in explaining change could be reached. Also, this research could shed light on the communicated OIs of LACs as presented in their strategic plans. It would be valuable if this source would be followed up by a study investigating how well espoused OIs align with daily practices and activities of these colleges.

Moreover, strategic plans are becoming more ubiquitous and considered as critical documents which could reveal and uncover much more about how HEOs and their transformations (Fumasoli et al., 2015; Morphew et al., 2018). However, more empirical work is required in order to understand their impact and function. Part of this work should be studying the success and long term impact of these plans. In other words, it is important to investigate whether strategic plans manifest real changes in colleges' behaviors and activities in a long run. Moreover, it would be also be interesting to examine the impact of critical decisions made in regard to OI change after implementing it. An example can be studying how Bennett's decision to serve women of color and not only African American women has impacted this college's

enrollment, its financial stability and its relationship with its stakeholders (e. g., alumnae).

The study also focused on analyzing the content of the texts and the interpretations of their meanings from the context that surrounds them. To increase the knowledge about certain key terms used in the strategic documents of LACs and how they have acquired new or broader meanings, another study could focus on soliciting meanings from the leaders of those colleges about these terms. Definitions of the terms like "leadership development", "civic engagement", "residential life", for example, from the leaders and faculty would also provide a richer meaning and more detail and depth to what this research has revealed. Do these terms still carry their original meaning and purpose? Have they acquired totally new meanings or additional meanings besides the original ones? In other words, it would be good to investigate whether the change in operationalizing (institutionalization) the established values and labels of the colleges may lead to some kind of weakening "de-institutionalization" of the traditional meanings and practices associated with those values or labels.

A related study could investigate the processes by which colleges formulate and change their OIs. Such analyses would illuminate how campus leaders determine what is a problem and how to respond to it, which in turn would illuminate how leaders of these organizations decide how to revise their old plans to produce their new communicated. This process is expected to be a contentious one, usually results in tensions and conflicts, especially between institutional leadership, faculty and other members (Gioia et al., 2013; Stensaker, 2015). It is a process where these leaders would be struggling in balancing between maintaining and erasing, expanding or focusing, and between protecting the distinctive and traditional identity and developing responsiveness to changing needs. Findings of such a study might illuminate how this balance can be reached by those leaders. It can also shed light on the role of power structure, highlighted

previously under the implications of theory, in facing resistance and skepticism of change in the OI.

The study demonstrated the complexity of organizational change in higher education. Contradictory dimensions of organizations played roles in the transformations the colleges made in their OIs. Given this complexity, it is important to study the change process and not to focus on the outcome of this change process. The use of strategic plans in this research demonstrated that these documents can illuminate the sense-making processes. OIs are not only an output of sense-making, but also highlight the ways in which organizations respond to internal and external imperatives. This has also been reflected in other empirical and theoretical research (Stensaker, 2015; Gioia & Thomas 1996). The additional studies suggested here would further examine complexities that cannot be seen when only focusing on the outcome of the changes in organizations like HEOs. Eexamining those hidden elements can lead to better understanding both of organizational behavior and or institutional theory (Stensaker, 2004).

Practical Implications

The findings of this study also suggest implications for practice at LACs. Those findings showed that OI is a multidimensional concept which could be used in several activities related to change in higher education (Stensaker, 2015). With the transformational forces facing HEOs in general and LACs in particular, it is important for leaders of those organizations to know how to deal with the need for both change and for stability in their organizations. Leaders need to know how to draw a connection between their college's past, its present and its future. OI can be a resource for leaders who undertake this work. Leaders of LACs can use OI as a tool to encourage both innovation and continuity in their organizations. Stensaker (2015) explains this dual role of OI. He highlights, that, on one hand, leaders can use OI as the point of reference, interpretive

scheme, to drive the sense of organizational members of what is the core and important elements of their organizations as they try to interpret any new situation they face. In other words, they build on what organizational members already know about their organization (its history and tradition, core values). In this way, OI can foster order and stability and serve as a filter through which information is sorted and ordered according to importance and relevance. On the other hand, leaders, especially under new challenging situations, can also invite members for a need of reinterpretation of the established meanings of their OIs to enhance innovation and adaptation to new demands, without any negative impact on the integrity and credibility of the organization. This process of creative reinterpretation has been applied at HEOs with very strong and distinct OIs (Stensaker, 2004).

At the same time, leaders should be careful stewards of their colleges' OIs. Flexibility and adaptation of the OI of their colleges (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991) are necessary to cope with the continuous change surrounding their colleges. To make it more likely that these changes seem sensible to other members of the organization, leaders need to maintain the plausibility and relevance of their OIs. Changes in the OI must be widely circulated and carefully explained. In this process, the institutional leaders can guide the various interpretations of the identity and bring them all to a common sense (Stensaker, 2015). They can significantly act not only as sense-makers in a change situation, but also as sense-givers that wisely provide the symbols and frames of the identity to stimulate motivation, action and discussion (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Emphasizing organizational consistency over time (Selznick, 1957), despite the natural complexity of the multiple perspectives and changing interests with which it is associated, is necessary to maintain its viability and sustain its legitimacy in the eyes of both internal and external stakeholders (Golant et al., 2013).

Leaders of these colleges may find it beneficial to acknowledge the paradoxes they face with regard to responding to both internal and external expectations. Though those paradoxes are challenging, they are also necessary. If leaders of LACs focus on adjusting the OIs of their colleges to avoid contradictions between these different needs, they may risk creating an OI that is too rigid and cannot adapt to the needs of various contexts and constituencies (Huang-Horowitz & Evans, 2020). In other words, OI should be considered as a framework for guiding the response to new needs and challenges. It is a framework that can provide the organizations with solutions and new creative ways of dealing with its problems and difficulties. While the framework needs to be stable, the solutions are always changing depending on the new circumstances. Thus, what is required, as a practical implication, is developing the strategic to balance those different needs. Instead of backtracking when contradictory interpretations of OI result from the needs to respond to different stakeholders, college leaders can develop stronger communication strategies to address tensions caused by those contradictions (Huang-Horowitz & Evans, 2020).

The findings also offer a call for LACs' leaders who are in charge of initiating and leading change in these institutions to be careful when they consider changes related to the distinctive history and features of the OIs of their colleges. These distinctive historical features of the OIs can play a central role in developing coherence between their past and new identities. Thus, leaders can give their colleges a competitive advantage if they incorporate the distinctiveness of their colleges into their strategy work of organizational change (Hatch & Schultz, 2017). As mentioned earlier, the distinctiveness that is required is not the one that makes those colleges isolated, not responding to the needs of the current time for the sake of staying distinctive. What is requires is a distinctiveness that makes it a "responsive college", as described

by Selznick (1996) “a responsive institution avoids insularity without embracing opportunism.”

Although the plans of some colleges included specific objectives and tactics of how to achieve their main goals, the analyzed strategic plans of some colleges included terms and phrases that were introduced as critical elements of these plans; however, the language used when referring to those terms were vague and broad. For example, some colleges described “lifelong learning” and/or “global citizenship” as key elements of their liberal education without specifying the practical steps for achieving them. I would recommend that colleges’ officials need to make sure that the content of their plans does not only serve an inspirational role. These plans should be tools to communicate carefully and intentionally the values and goals of their colleges. Precise, specific parameters should clarify what terms mean in the real world and how to translate these concepts into behaviors and actions. Change and stability of any organization are achieved through the actions of the members of this organization (faculty and staff) and how they react to the values and interests articulated in those plans. Through their positions, skills and commitments, these plans can become a tangible reality or they can function primarily to instill confidence in the college’s audience. If the focus is only building confidence, leaders of those colleges may risk that confidence by declaring to offer one thing when they actually offer something very different (Taylor & Morphew, 2010).

Conclusion

This study aimed at understanding change in private not-for-profit LACs by conducting a content analysis of their OIs as communicated in their strategic plans. More specifically, it has focused on understanding the conflicts between the two versions of institutional theory. Based on the findings, selected private LACs developed a more complex OI over time in an attempt to manage several paradoxes. Instead of maintaining a fixed purpose, meaning and practices of

their liberal arts education or changing it dramatically to fit current needs of their students, the colleges chose to change the operationalization of this core value of their identities. The strategic plans of the colleges tended to connect their traditional identities (e.g., national liberal arts, residential) with new elements of this identity (e.g., global liberal arts for career development).

The findings also revealed that OIs of the colleges tried to respond both the internal pressures and external environments together. Both the normative elements of change and the intraorganizational ones were reflected in the OIs of the colleges. Later plans, however, demonstrated the greater role of the external factors, suggesting that the environment became more important than internal pressures over time. However, using the traditional values and labels to respond to the external demands highlighted the role of intraorganizational elements. Findings also revealed that the colleges could maintain their distinctive features that distinguished them from other LACs, though distinctive features that might limit enrollment tended to receive less emphasis than did other unusual characteristics.

The above findings demonstrate the struggle LACs are facing between their need to save their tradition and the pressure to stray away from it in order to recruit more students and, thus, enhance their survival. If a conclusion can be made from this study, it is that change is a complex, multi-dimensional phenomenon (Kezar, 2014). The colleges I have examined here are part of a much larger phenomenon that is underway to various degrees throughout higher education. This effort of studying changes in LACs could also shed light on changes in HEOs. To account for this complexity of change in HE, it would be more plausible to find a middle way by balancing the insights from old and new institutionalism in order to get a more accurate view of the dynamics of organizational change (Fumasoli & Stensaker, 2013). The combination of both theories can help to clarify the multiple conflicting factors triggering change in HEOs and

the potential consequences of this change. Integrating the two versions would offer an analytical approach combining the influence of the environment on the change of HEOs with an emphasis on the intraorganizational processes that direct the actions in regard to this change (Greenwoods & Hinings, 1996; Fumasoli & Stensaker, 2013). Likewise, this combination would highlight the benefits of protecting the distinctive organizational values and traditions while simultaneously adapting to the changing environment of HE.

There is a strategic value of applying the concept of OI with its multidimensional nature. Instead of viewing OI as a rigid entity or advocating for it to be a continuous change to be all things to all audiences, actively building OI as framework that can provide creative solutions and responses can contribute to competitive advantage where internal and external factors can be considered and addressed. (Selznick, 1996). The analysis revealed that OI has the potential to provide HEOs with significant flexibility during change, not only as a strategic tool for legitimating change in the eyes of internal and external constituencies (Stensaker, 2015), but also as a strategic means for dealing with uncertainty in an increasingly turbulent external environment (Fumasoli et al., 2015).

Finally, as LACs and other HEOs are confronting challenging transformational forces, they need to remember that change, creativity and adaptation are necessary for their success, continuity and effectiveness. However, campus leaders must not forget the central purpose of their existence, which is education. If they do not let this purpose direct these necessary changes and adaptations, they may consciously or unconsciously end up moving away from their main character, roles and legacy as educational institutions. As Gumport (2000) warned that "wholesale adaptations to market pressures and managerial rationales could thereby subsume the discourse about the future of colleges and universities within a logic of economic rationality at a

detriment to the longer-term educational legacies and democratic interests that have long characterized American public education" (Gumport, 2000, p.67). Preserving the organization while abandoning its core purpose would defeat the purpose of adapting in the first place. With its focus on both durable internal factors and flexible responses to external pressures, OI offers a lens through which scholars and practitioners can foreground a core purpose while remaining adaptable in uncertain times.

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